DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 536 CG 012 774

AUTHOR	Macleod, Anne
TITLE	Growing Up in America: A Background to Contemporary Drug Abuse.
INSTITUTION	Biospherics Inc., Rockville, Md.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. on Drug Abuse (DHEW/PHS), Rockville, Md.
REPORT NO	DHEW-ADM-76-106
PUB DATE	76
CONTRACT	NIMH-42-70-143
NOTE	105p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402 (Stock no. 017-024-00290-9, price $1.40)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$6.01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescence; *Drug Abuse; Drug Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Junior High School Students; *School Role; State of the Art Reviews; Student Needs; *Student Problems; Student School Relationship; *Suburban Environment; *Urban Environment

ABSTRACT

This book is aimed at helping school personnel and others understand the world as youths experience it and to prepare them to respond to young people's search for philosophical answers. Understanding the life context and viewpoint of young adolescents is assumed to be a prerequisite for understanding drug abuse and for communicating with youngsters about drug abuse. The text is based principally on youngsters' self-reports recorded throughout the literature and on studies of life in inner city and suburban environments. However, many of its findings and the commentary reflect and are applicable to youths and their schools in all types of communities. Also included in this text are literature excerpts and discussions of how schools can attempt to meet the needs of youth from a variety of environments. Annotated bibliographies concerning drug use and the special problems of young adolescents are included for both teachers and students. (Author/RF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

National Institute on Drug Abuse

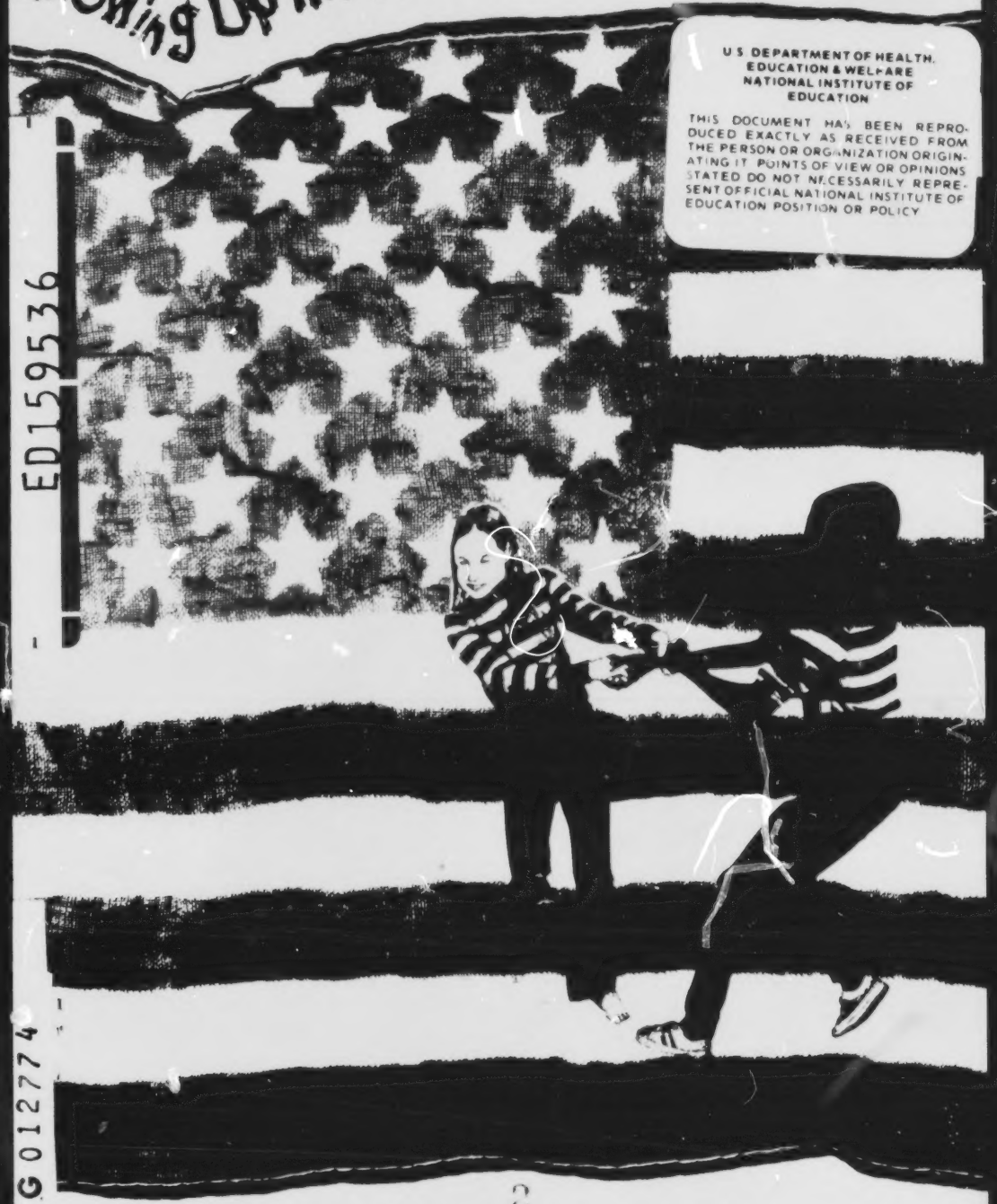
CG

GROWing Up in AmeRica a background to contemporary drug abuse

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED159536



CG012774

2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Public Health Service
Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

GROWING UP IN AMERICA
- a background to contemporary drug abuse

ANNE MACLEOD

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE
11400 ROCKVILLE PIKE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852

This monograph was prepared under contract number 42–70–143 from the National Institute of Mental Health to Biospherics, Inc., Rockville, Maryland. The author, Anne MacLeod, is a specialist in children's literature, and a Ph.D. candidate in American Intellectual History at the University of Maryland.

The opinions presented herein—either original or quoted—do not necessarily reflect the positions of the National Institute of Mental Health or the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

DHEW Publication No. (ADM) 76-106
Reprinted 1974, 1975, 1976

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402 - Price $1.40
Stock No. 017-024-00290-9
25% discount allowed on orders of 100 or more to one address

There is a minimum charge of $1.00 for each mail order

FOREWORD

The first step toward the solution of any problem is understanding. In this, drug abuse is not different from any other problem, however new and baffling it may seem in other respects. All our alarm, all our concern counts for little unless we are willing to work toward an understanding of not only the medical and scientific aspects of the problem, but also of its social and emotional context. We must assess, then, the problem itself and its background as well.

For the many Americans who are deeply troubled by the phenomenon of drug abuse, the natural first question centers on the extent of the problem. Surprisingly, for all the attention given to the "drug dilemma" over the past several years, this question is not easy to answer with any precision. Statistics on the scope of drug abuse and addiction are estimates based on a large variety of sources, including reports from law enforcement agencies, surveys, questionnaires and hospital studies. Quite obviously, these sources vary in reliability; whatever figures they produce must be regarded as approximations of reality, and must be used with caution.

All the same, however uncertain the totals, current statistics do establish two clear trends—and both are sobering. The first is that abuse of drugs in the United States is increasing, and the second is that drug use is increasing in progressively younger age groups. Not too long ago, problems of drug use and addiction were almost wholly associated with big cities and with poverty. Today, such problems can be found in all economic groups and in towns and rural areas all across the country. Similarly, the use and abuse of drugs have spread from special adult groups to college students, to high school and junior high school students, and now to children in elementary school. Drug abuse itself is not new; it is as old as man's knowledge that drugs can provide escape from pain and reality. What is new is its reach across social and economic lines, and into the lives of children.

The problem of drug abuse by young people, by which I mean drug use that goes beyond mere experimentation, can scarcely be understood when separated from its context. That context is the whole life of the youngster. I think that our understanding of the drug problem and our effort to communicate with young people must include, therefore, an understanding as well of the quality of life for young people in America today. We must try to see how the present and the future look to them, and to understand how well the present prepares them for the future. If they need help, we must be able to understand how and at what point we can best offer that help.

For teachers and school counselors, as well as parents and others who deal with children in the sensitive period of early adolescence, such under-

standing is particularly vital. It is at this period in a child's life that he begins to take a strong interest in moral and ethical issues and social problems. It is also the time that he becomes increasingly aware of the contemporary drug scene and formulates his stance on this issue. This book is aimed at helping school personnel and others understand the world as youths experience it, and to prepare them to respond to young people's search for philosophical answers. While the text is based principally on studies of inner city and suburban environments, many of its findings and the commentary reflect and are applicable to youths and their schools in communities of all types throughout the country.

Finally, if we can understand the viewpoint of youngsters, we can then begin to work toward providing meaningful alternatives to drug abuse. And this, I am sure, is the long-range answer to the problem. A meaningful life in the real world is the solution we must seek to the problem of drug abuse by the young. To this end, we need to devote our private and our professional skills, sympathy, and imagination. This is surely no time for pessimism or despair; when concern is joined with understanding, we can solve our problems.

Bertram S. Brown, M.D.
Director
National Institute of Mental Health

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Joel Cantor, Ph.D., was the original project officer on the development of this manuscript, prior to his joining the Veterans Administration drug abuse programs. He was succeeded by Louise Richards, Ph.D., research psychologist, Center for Studies of Narcotic and Drug Abuse, NIMH. Robert Shellow, Ph.D., professor of Urban Studies at the Carnegie Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh, Pa., acted as consultant on the project.

CONTENTS

		Page
	Foreword	iii
Chapter I:	Growing Up in America in the 1970's	1
Chapter II:	Growing Up in the Inner City	13
Chapter III:	Growing Up in the Suburbs	27
Chapter IV:	The Schools and Their Problems	40
Chapter V:	Bringing the Worlds Together	57
	References Used in This Book	72
Appendix I:	Annotated Bibliography for Teachers	75
Appendix II:	Annotated Bibliography for Students	85

Chapter I

GROWING UP IN AMERICA IN THE 1970's

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

—King Lear, Act V, Scene iii

Of all the problems of American life today, few are more disturbing to most adults than the problem of drug abuse among the young. As a society, America has always been deeply concerned with her children. Since the 17th century, foreign observers have remarked upon how Americans cherish—and spoil—their children. And it is true that children are the hope and the inheritors of the Nation; to them adults have always expected to hand on the best of worlds: comfortable, free, hopeful. Americans have generally felt that their society, however imperfect in minor ways, is better than other, older societies and that their children are blessed by being born in America.

Drug abuse by the young seems a violent repudiation of this familiar dream. The use of drugs for sensation or escape would seem to signal a deep dissatisfaction with life as it is, yet to many adults, the life of at least the middle-class youngster of the 1970's looks far more comfortable and more privileged than was their own in the teen years. Many parents of today's teenagers were themselves children of the depression; by comparison with those drab and difficult years, today seems incredibly affluent and, for children, easy.

But to consider that childhood or adolescence today is easy is to assume first, that the stresses of contemporary society felt by adults are not felt by children, and second, that all of the recent changes in American society have made things easier for those in their growing years. The evidence, however, runs counter to both these assumptions. Children *do* feel the strains of our society and there is every reason to believe that many of the newer features of contemporary American culture make growing up more, rather than less, difficult.

Dr. Stanley F. Yolles, former Director of NIMH, speaking before a congressional committee on the subject of drug use by young people, noted

that the national rates of suicide, alcoholism, violent crime, and divorce suggest that perhaps the majority of Americans find their social and human environment less than satisfactory. Dr. Yolles went on to point out that drug abuse is "a symptom, an index of the confusions and uncertainties which affect increasing numbers of young people."

Eda LeShan child guidance authority and author, has said in ***The Conspiracy Against Childhood*** (1967, p. 4), "This is a TERRIBLE time to be a child."

> The rate of child suicide mounts each year; an increasing number of children under the age of sixteen suffer from diseases associated with tension, such as ulcers, colitis, migraine, falling hair and asthma; some of our most indulged and privileged adolescents take drugs . . . increasing numbers of American children are failing their schoolwork. No matter how quickly psychiatric facilities are provided, they are unable to handle the demands for services for children and their families. Increasing numbers of parents each year find themselves feeling more and more helpless and hopeless about the behavior and attitudes they see developing in their children, for, despite all we do to try to make our children happy, more and more of them seem "shook up" and angry at us.

A 1970 White House Conference on Children Forum takes at least as serious a view: "Millions of our children are turning to drugs. Venereal disease rates are soaring. The teen suicide rate is shocking. FBI reports show the juvenile crime rate hitting record highs. Welfare rolls are swelling. Policemen and others representing authority are under attack; . . . great numbers of young people are alienated from their parents."

If statistics on the number of children who run away from home can be used as an index to their unhappiness, the figures are both startling and sad. During Senate hearings in 1972 on the Runaway Youth Act it was estimated that at least one million young people run away each year.[1] An earlier NIMH study indicated that one of every three youngsters seriously considers running away at some time during his growing up.[2]

It also seems to be a fact that more and more children are alienated from school, whether they go to suburban or to ghetto schools. John Holt's now-famous book, ***How Children Fail*** (1964, p. 15) begins by saying:

> Most children in school fail.
>
> For a great many, this failure is avowed and absolute. Close to 40 percent of those who begin high school, drop out before they finish. For college, the figure is one in three.
>
> Many others fail in fact if not in name. They complete their schooling only because we have agreed to push them up through the grades and out of the schools, whether they know anything or not. There are many more such children than we think. If we raise our standards much higher, as some would

[1] Report No. 92-1002, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1972, page 3.
[2] Shellow et al. ***Suburban Runaways of the 1960's***, page 53.

> have us do, we will find out very soon just how many there are. Our classrooms will bulge with kids who can't pass the test to get into the next class.
>
> But there is a more important sense in which almost all children fail: Except for a handful, who may or may not be good students, they fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning, understanding, and creating with which they were born and of which they made full use during the first two or three years of their lives.

For Holt, the word "failure" must be made to include those youngsters who physically remain in school and whose grades are "passing," but who are mentally withdrawn from school activity and not really learning anything. Paul Goodman, another critic of American schools, has also described such children: "Numerically far more important than overt dropouts at 16 . . . are the children who conform to schooling between the ages of 6 to 16 or 20, but who drop out internally and daydream, their days wasted, their liberty caged and scheduled. And there are many such. . . ." Holt asks why children fail so abjectly in school and summarizes his answer to the question this way: "They fail because they are afraid, bored and confused. They are afraid, above all else, of failing, of disappointing or displeasing the many anxious adults around them, whose limitless hopes and expectations for them hang over their heads like a cloud."

Middle-class children and ghetto children alike suffer from stress, though it usually has very different sources. A fourth-grade class in East Harlem is described in ***The Schoolchildren: Growing Up in the Slums:*** "Many are disturbed, seven severely. Fifteen or more have asthmatic attacks. Ten thumbsuckers . . . Some children fall asleep two or three times a day. Teachers cannot determine why in each case—malnutrition, fatigue, stress. . . ."

Perhaps it is not surprising that children under such pressure and so fearful or so convinced of failure do sometimes rebel, especially in the teen years, when some rebellion is in any case a normal thing. Perhaps it is not surprising either that drug use or at least experimentation is sometimes the form that rebellion takes. The kind of long preparation for life asked of middle-class children, with its doctrine of hard work and deferred rewards, requires a high degree of rationality. For middle-class children, drugs may be an anti-rational reaction. They offer instant ecstasy, hightened experience, overwhelming feeling, escape—all nonrational. Dr. Richard Blum, program director, Joint Program in Drugs, Crime, and Community Studies, Institute for Public Policy Analysis, Stanford University, suggests that drug use by students represents, in part, a reaction against rationality (National Institute of Mental Health 1969, p. 82):

> I think students are tired of rationality and things associated with it—foresight, control, discipline, the Protestant ethic bit, grace gained only in later life—for they are hard to live with. To be irrational, to be allowed to have an ecstatic experience, even a mushy one, that is not so bad if one must live with the rational computer night and day, as these kids are beginning to have to do.

For the slum child, on the other hand, drugs may simply offer escape from a life that is already irrational.

Growing up has never been easy; the passage from childhood to maturity is hazardous and stormy. But there is little doubt that as a society grows more complex and as preparation for maturity is increasingly prolonged by more and more years spent in school, growing up gets harder.

The child's role in family and society has changed profoundly in present-day America. Once upon a time—and not so very long ago—a child was a vital part of a family's financial survival. When most families farmed for a living, children were an economic necessity. Even in early industrial society, children became working members of society at a relatively early age; at 16, most young people were self-supporting.

In today's world, it is difficult indeed for a person of 16 to find and keep a job. The person who does not finish high school is severely handicapped economically. Only the deadest of dead-end jobs are available to him; he has no employment future. Furthermore, for many jobs, a high school diploma is insufficient these days. A college degree has become what the high school diploma was a generation or two ago, that is, the necessary passport to the vast majority of nonprofessional jobs.

The result of all this is to prolong the dependency of childhood many years beyond what was normal a few generations ago. Many parents expect to support their children until the age of 22 or even longer. Growing up is, economically and socially, postponed.

The postponement of maturity is less than satisfactory from the viewpoint of adults and young people alike. Bruno Bettelheim, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Chicago, told a congressional subcommittee in 1969 that "[our] society keeps the next generation too long dependent in terms of mature responsibility and a striving for independence. . . . To be adolescent means that one has reached and even passed the age of puberty, is at the very height of one's physical development—healthier, stronger, even handsomer than one has been, or will be, for the rest of one's life—but must nevertheless postpone full adulthood till long beyond what any other period in history has considered reasonable."

One college student said it this way: "When one is prodded into spending a long time 'preparing for a good life' which when it's reached is already two-thirds over, there is something somehow strange. . . ."
Another spoke for many when she said, "I'm tired of being potential."

Examining the long interlude between childhood and adulthood, Edgar Friedenberg, educator and sociologist, has called adolescence the "last colonialism." The extended dependency of American children deprives them of any real role in our society, except that of student—and "students in America are rarely treated with . . . respect," according to Friedenberg. They "almost always find themselves in the custody of officials who oscillate between trying to win their good will and betraying their confidence in order to retain that of the public which supports and controls the institution."

In fact, Friedenberg (1965*b*, p. 67) points out, it can be argued that the task of our public schools is less that of education than of simply retaining children until they have reached a particular age.

> Our laws governing school attendance do not deal with education. They are not *licensing* laws, requiring attendance until a certain defined minimum competence, presumed essential for adult life, has been demonstrated. They are not *contractual;* they offer no remedy for failure of the school to provide services of a minimum quality. A juvenile may not legally withdraw from school even if he can establish that it is substandard or that he is being ill-treated there. . . . The compulsory attendance law guarantees him nothing, not even the services of qualified teachers. It merely defines, in terms of age alone, a particular group as subject to legal restrictions not applicable to other persons.

Within school or without, in fact, young people have few legal rights. The "right" of a person under 18 to be tried as a juvenile can be suspended by the State. In an article published in ***The American Scholar***, Senator Birch Bayh pointed out that "more than one-half of the children presently being held in detention centers, training schools and other correctional institutions have never even been charged with the equivalent of an adult crime." [1] In many States, persons under 18 cannot be treated by a doctor (for venereal disease, for instance) without parental consent. There are often good reasons behind laws like this last; the basic responsibility of parents for their children is usually upheld by the law. Just the same, the point made by Friedenberg is inescapable: Children under 18 have no certain legal status in our society.

A White House Conference paper (1970, pp. 22–25) addressed to the rights of children has noted that

> Although adult rights have been specifically delineated in the law and Bill of Rights, children are still considered objects to be protected—indeed, almost possessions. . . . Children constitute one of our largest and most vulnerable minority groups. But, they have no voice in political processes, and they do not directly participate in lobbies on their own behalf. . . . Their rights can be and frequently are infringed upon, often by those who declaim that they act in the child's interest.

Few of the critics of the present situation would suggest that a child's legal status can or should be exactly that of an adult citizen. But they point out that certain basic human rights can be extended to all persons, regardless of age. In a society almost obsessively given to data-gathering, for instance, any person should be protected against the indiscriminate use of tests and release of data without his knowledge and consent. Children do not now enjoy such protection because their status as persons is presently unclear.

It is perhaps possible to see that when teenaged children grow their hair long and shaggy and wear what their parents only consider outlandish cloth-

[1] Bayh, Birch. Toward juvenile justice. ***The American Scholar,*** 40(4):663, Autumn 1971.

ing, they may be making a desperate grab for some means of identity, some way of establishing for themselves the place and role they do not find otherwise. Their language is likewise a private code and is meant to set them apart. The music they like is anathema to many of their elders and this is almost certainly no accident. Teenagers are engaged in creating for themselves an identity denied them by the wider society. In fact, teenagers' clothes and ways have been "faddy" for a long time—just as long as teenagers have been seen as a distinct group, neither quite children nor yet quite adult. It is not hard to see this faddiness as the adolescent's response to his isolation-by-age-group. Having prolonged immaturity thrust upon them, youngsters embrace it and make an identity out of being noticeably "teenaged."

Most adults quite naturally refuse to take teenaged fads seriously, but the isolation from the rest of society felt by the young should be viewed more soberly, for it can be a real drawback to successfully growing up. One youngster, affluent and middle-class, left home at 16. He says, "Parents haven't the vaguest notion of what's going on. They are leading dual lives with their kids. Except for a few financial benefits, the kids have no need for their parents, and most parents have no need for their kids. . . ."

Youngsters who feel like this—and there are many of them—are thrown entirely upon their own resources and those of other young people. It is a rare 16-year-old, however, whose inner resources are great enough to carry him unaided to maturity. The fact is that children isolated from adult standards and support are almost always children in trouble. The 1970 White House Conference on Children (1970, pp. 15–24) has commented on the far-reaching effects of the generation split:

> The isolation of children from adults simultaneously threatens the growth of the individual and the survival of the society. The young cannot pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. It is primarily through observing, playing and working with others older and younger than himself that a child discovers both what he can do and who he can become—that he develops both his ability and his identity. It is primarily through exposure and interaction with adults and children of different ages that a child acquires new interests and skills and learns the meaning of tolerance, cooperation, and compassion. Hence to relegate children to a world of their own is to deprive them of their humanity.

By comparison with the past, growing up in America today is frequently lonely, isolated, even impersonal. Much of what Americans have regarded as progress has had unexpected costs for young people. Mobility, for instance—always a visible part of American life—has increased until it is a normal condition for an American family, especially suburban families. Each year one out of every five American families changes homes.

For most of those who move from place to place, from job to job, mobility is part of a general *upward* progress. Americans move to take a better job, to settle in a more satisfactory neighborhood or a bigger house, to find better schools. They are doing what Americans have always done—taking the opportunity, whenever and wherever it comes, to move up.

But if mobility has its blessings—as it surely has—it has costs as well, and, however one judges, it is undeniable that the constant mobility of modern living has brought great changes into the process of growing up.

Children must make their way among strangers, must face new communities and new schools far more often than did their counterparts in an earlier time. It can hardly be doubted that when families stayed in one place throughout a child's life, when communities were smaller and more stable, it was easier for a young person to identify himself in relation to the people and the places around him and to grow up with a sense of belonging to some particular place. Today's children are by comparison rootless.

As a result, life is impersonal for many children. The day when a child knew well the local grocer, the neighborhood police, the firemen, minister, and the teachers in his school—such times are gone for the majority of our children. It is generally said that city life can be lonely and impersonal; it is less often acknowledged that suburban life may be almost as anonymous. The constant turnover of many suburban communities, together with their sheer size, makes them something less than what our grandparents meant by communities. No one "knows everybody in town" anymore.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead has commented on the paradoxical effects of American mobility on children. Mobility has brought about flexibility, awareness, and "a capacity to shift and change, to pause and weigh." But there is a price and that is "the price of loneliness, of the sense that each venture along a path unguarded by the friendly spirits of past generations."

Curiously enough, in spite of our mobility as a people, American children tend to be isolated in their own ways of life. Herbert Kohl, teaching in Harlem, found that few of his sixth-grade students had ever been beyond Harlem, though their families moved often within Harlem.

Suburban children often show a similar narrowness of experience. They know little of the inner city; many have never ridden on buses, streetcars, or subways, few have seen much of people very different from themselves. Though they move often, they tend to move to communities very much like the ones they have left. A paper for the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth called suburbs "one-class communities" which do not provide a child with a realistic picture of the world around him. One researcher has observed that suburban young people are "naive about the world because they have been 'ghettoized' in suburbia." A doctor who lives with his family in an affluent midwestern suburb agrees: "The kids have warped ideas about what life is like. There's no way to expose them to it except in artificial ways. They see that CBS show on hunger. Do they know what that's really about? They don't understand."

For the suburban child, the experience of only one way of life leaves him with a narrow and unrealistic idea of the world he lives in. The range and variety of human society is unknown to him; he is ignorant of the ways and problems of others. Because he has never known much physical discomfort, let alone deprivation, he is often quite unaware that it exists for others.

Perhaps more important, from his own standpoint, the suburban youngster is insulated from a sense of what there is to do in the world. The

boredom of suburban children is partly a product of that insularity. Too often, suburban teenagers see nothing worth doing in the world. As one recent high school graduate put it, "I just feel there's nothing to do and there never will be. There's nothing more to be discovered. . . ."

The ghetto child is even more disadvantaged by confinement to his own way of life, for his horizons tend to be limited by his ignorance of the possibilities of the world outside the ghetto. He knows of the existence of other ways of life only dimly (largely through television) and often is unaware of how to achieve them.

Mobility and modern working conditions have imposed a special kind of isolation on families, too. The three-generation family has been broken by physical distance; an extended family is a rarity in America today. In the past, a child had many adults to relate to and identify with, living in the same house or at least nearby. The traditional extended family included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as parents and children. This meant that a child could turn to any one of a number of grown people for advice, support, sympathy—whatever he needed. It meant too that children had a variety of adult images available. A drunken father was less a psychological disaster to a boy who had a stalwart uncle to lean on and look up to than he is today for the boy with no other adult male figure close at hand. A neurotic, overly critical mother was often balanced for the child of the past by a warmhearted grandmother or aunt.

Today, the typical American family consists of two parents, or one, and children. Such a "nuclear" family leaves only a very small margin for error. One bad parent is a serious problem for a child; two constitute a catastrophe. Brutal, indifferent, or otherwise difficult parents have always been an obstacle to the normal development of their children, but their destructive influence is clearly greater when it is not diluted in a child's experience by close contact with other, normal adults.

The child of the one-parent family is in an even more precarious position. The present high rate of divorce in the United States—one of every four marriages—means that many American children are raised by just one parent, usually the mother. But recent research has begun to make clear how important the role of the father is in a child's growing up: mothers, even the wisest and most understanding mothers, cannot substitute physically or psychologically for fathers. Dr. Loren R. Mosher, a National Institute of Mental Health psychiatrist, analyzed the 1960 Census figures and found the absence of a father a stronger factor in juvenile delinquency than poverty.

Divorce is in the background of fully a third of the youngsters arrested for serious crime in the suburbs. In fact, recent studies (by Yale research groups) have associated juvenile delinquency with the absence of fathers in the family not just for American culture, but all around the world. Yet divorce, separation, and the demands of highly competitive business and professional lives have removed fathers as an influence in many modern families.

An American childhood, then, is much extended, often isolated, and only very loosely tied to the stabilizing influences of tradition. It is at the same time a childhood bombarded with constant change and the need for adjust-

ment. Such conditions make an uneasy atmosphere for growing up. According to Margaret Mead, "American children are growing up in the most rapidly changing culture of which we have any record in the world. . . . So long-standing and so rapid have been these processes of change that expectation of change and anxiety about change have been built into our character as a people."

In fact, change might be called a chronic condition of contemporary life. It has been observed more than once that ours is the first society to understand and even take for granted that the children who are growing up today will find the world of their adult lives vastly different from that of their childhood. But if the fact is understood, its potential for creating anxiety is often overlooked or even denied.

In general, at least up until very recently, Americans have seen change as progress. Such a view, however, depends upon the ability to maintain a sense of continuity with the past as well as a feeling of control over the future, and these are slipping away from many Americans today. The pace of social change has increased until the sense of connection with both past and future has disappeared, leaving an anxious feeling that time and events are moving too fast to be grasped.

Kenneth Keniston, Professor of Psychology at Yale Medical School and author of ***The Uncommitted,*** (1960) an analysis of alienated youth in American society, has observed that the chronic social change of contemporary society is "a deep source of stress to Americans." It splits the generations apart, for if the experience of the past cannot be applied to the tasks of the future, then the older generation has nothing "relevant" to teach the younger; the older generation is "square," "out of it," "obsolete." Chronic rapid change tends, too, to create what Keniston calls "the cult of the present," which takes many forms, including "the quest for 'kicks,' speed, sex, and stimulants. . . ." And, for young people, it creates a serious problem of identification, since "to choose to be exactly like one's father or mother is to choose obsolescence; indeed, it is literally impossible. . . ."

In all these ways, the major task of adolescence, the identification of self and of values to live by, is complicated. Keniston continues (pp. 236–237):

> There are, of course, some values that endure; and many youths manage eventually to find them and in some way to devote themselves to them. But as the rate of change increases, in each generation there are fewer and fewer such values, fewer practices that have a feeling of solidity, fewer ways of life that have a ring of endurance. As a result, many young men and women choose, as they must, to commit themselves to change itself. . . .
>
> Though few of us consciously experience it as such, the pressure to respond to changes in every aspect of our lives places us under a great strain, and especially presses hard on adolescents who are searching for commitments that will last a lifetime. . . . The virtues of flexibility, openness, and tolerance are noble; but unless they are supported by a firm sense of

> self, of identity, and of direction, it is hard for most men and women to distinguish these virtues from senseless and passive conformity. And above all, this combination of a universal human need for enduring ground on which to build one's life plus a shifting social order in which to live it places an added burden on young Americans attempting to chart the course of the rest of their lives.

The quest for values to last a lifetime and the search for goals are deeply affected by an ennvironment of ceaseless cultural change. Old ideals are challenged, old aims are set aside, sometimes supplanted by new ones, sometimes not. Many observers of the contemporary American scene note a feeling of drift; older ideas have been abandoned but not replaced.

One of the keenest critics of American society has centered his attention on the hazards of growing up today, putting special emphasis on the matter of goals in the lives of the young. Paul Goodman, well-known as a radical critic of our time and culture, says that we ask our children to "grow up absurd." This is mainly because they have little to grow up *FOR*, he believes. "The young *really* need a more worthwhile world in order to grow up at all," Goodman says. Boys especially feel keenly the lack of "man's work" —jobs which produce necessary food and shelter. Too much of this world's work is "make-work," jobs which seem to have little real justification for the men who do them. He says (1956, pp. 19–20):

> Consider a likely useful job. A youth who is alert and willing but not "verbally intelligent"—perhaps he has quit high school at the eleventh grade . . .—chooses for auto mechanic. That's a good job, familiar to him. . . . It's careful and dirty at the same time. In a small garage it's sociable; one can talk to the customers. . . . You please people in trouble by fixing their cars, and a man is proud to see rolling out on its own the car that limped in behind the tow truck. The pay is as good as the next fellow's. . . .
>
> So our young man takes his first-rate job. But what when he learns that the cars have a built-in obsolescence. . . . Gone are the days of keeping the jalopies in good shape, the artist work of a proud mechanic. . . .
>
> It is hard for the young man now to maintain his feelings of justification, sociability, servicability. . . .

In such ways, Goodman contends, the young are frustrated in their search for worthwhile work and a sense of self-respect about what they do.

Like Keniston, Goodman believes that the unresolved problems of our times fall most heavily on the young, making it hard to grow up.

Still, criticism of the present should not be allowed to transform the past into a rosy dreamland of perfection. Real improvements have been made in the lives of many American young people over those of their counterparts in, for instance, the 19th century. Child labor was a bleak fact of 19th- and early 20th-century life, and was not finally abolished until the 1930's. If schooling seems overly prolonged for many children today, it was both brief

and hard to come by for most of their predecessors. At the beginning of this century, only 6.4 percent of the Nation's population were high school graduates; today the figure is 76.6. The aspirations of many young people of 50 or more years ago were very much limited by the amount and quality of the schooling they were able to get, just as the ambitions of many ghetto children today are limited by poor schooling and early dropping-out. No doubt there is a long way to go before opportunity in American society is truly equal, but the opportunity for education at every level is more widespread today than it was 50 or 100 years ago.

In general, children today have more legal and physical protection than they had a century ago. Protection of the health of children has improved so greatly that accidental death has now replaced disease as the leading cause of death of persons under 21. Knowledge of good nutrition and abundance of food have combined to make American children among the healthiest in the world.

The record is not perfect; chronic ill-health and high infant mortality still prevail among poor Americans, and for all our knowledge and abundance, malnutrition is a serious problem in poverty areas. Nevertheless, great improvements in physical well-being have been made for the majority of American children in the 20th century.

Yet for all these gains, Americans of the 1970's find themselves still deeply concerned with problems of youth, and not only concerned, but baffled by the character and the complexity of the problems. And it is true that the problems of the past seemed more amenable to straightforward solutions, to medical advances, to legislation, and to the improvement of working and living conditions, than are those of the present. Innoculation against disease, once understood, is easier to accomplish than innoculation against fear or failure or loneliness. Disease is no longer the number-one killer of children, as it once was, but suicide is now the second most frequent cause of death among adolescents. Similarly, laws against the exploitation of the labor of children were slow to be passed, yet once on the books, they effectively ended child labor in factories and sweatshops. Not so successful are the laws which attempt to control the abuse of drugs by the young.

In fact, suicide and drug abuse illustrate well what is new about the problems of the youngster today. For each is self-administered; the victim is also the agent of destruction. Clearly, working out such problems is more than a matter of law and physical medicine. The psychological and social health of individual and society alike are involved.

No one can realistically hope for a society without problems or challenge, nor can change be halted or even slowed. But the human problems created by a fast-changing world can be coped with better when they are seen in perspective. The problem of drug abuse by young people must be placed against its broader social background so that it may be dealt with, not as a puzzling and isolated aberration of the young, but as one response to the pressures and dislocations of a highly complex, rapidly changing society, a society in which the difficulties of growing up are many and confusing.

The chapters that follow explore some of the environments in which children do their growing. The inner city, the suburb, and that dominant part

of a child's life, the school, will be considered. If the emphasis in each case seems to fall upon the darker side of the picture, it is because this is where the problems lie. But the search for understanding is itself an assertion of optimism, of a belief that, given enough knowledge and enough love, human beings can find a way to a solution of such problems as the alienation of the young and its awful symbol, drug abuse. After all, as Edgar Friedenberg has said, "Understanding . . . is more sustaining than cheerfulness."

Chapter II

GROWING UP IN THE INNER CITY

"All The Kids Call It 'Junky's Paradise.'"

From: ***The Block***, p. 84

My block is the most terrible block I've ever seen. There are at least 25 or 30 narcartic people in my block. The cops come around there and tries to act bad but I bet inside of them they are as scared as can be. They even had in the papers that this block is the worst block, not in Manhattan but in New York City. In the summer they don't do nothing except shooting, stabbing and fighting. They hang all over the stoops and when you say excuse me to them they hear you but they just don't feel like moving. Some times they make me so mad that I feel like slapping them and stuffing and bag of garbage down their throats. . . . If you don't believe this story come around some time and you'll find out.

I live on 117 street, between Madison and 5th avenue. All the bums live around here. But the truth is they don't live here; they just hang around the street. All the kids call it "Junky's Paradise." Because there is no cops to stop them. I wish that the cops would come around and put all the bums out of the block and put them in jail all their life. I would really like it very much if they would improve my neighborhood. I don't even go outside to play because of them. . . .

Around my block all you can see is drug addicts. . . .

My block is a dirty, crumby block.

Ounce their was a gang fight around my block and the police came and a man got shot. And their was detives around my block and junkies shot at a copes and a lady curse out the copes and they broke in a lady house. Around 119 street a cop was bricked and kill and junkies took dop and needles.

These paragraphs were written by 5th-grade students in a Harlem school.

Herbert Kohl (1967, pp. 46–49)—their teacher—had asked the children to describe the blocks where they lived. All by themselves, the paragraphs tell a great deal about the difficulties of growing up in the ghetto of a big American city today.

"Disadvantaged," as we call these children, seems too mild a word for their situation. Slum children are not only deprived in the sense that they lack the kind of material comforts and advantages common to much of American society, they are deprived because they never know the peace and security most Americans believe is the birthright of every child. These children are exposed to a firsthand knowledge of violence, degradation, and chaos that is difficult for the more fortunate to appreciate. No one is closer to some of the country's greatest domestic problems than the children of city slums. They are the most immediate victims of poverty, racial discrimination, and the breakdown of family and community.

First, they are poor. Poverty, as Michael Harrington pointed out in his book, *The Other America* (1962), is not so visible in present-day America as it was in the past. But appearances are deceptive, as Harrington proved, and as others have testified ever since. Harrington says (p. 13):

> America has the best-dressed poverty the world has ever known. For a variety of reasons, the benefits of mass production have been spread much more evenly in this area than in many others. . . . Even people with terribly depressed incomes can look prosperous.

Poverty does exist in America; it is the prevailing condition of the big city slum, and the children of the slum are among its most poignant sufferers.

Poor means poor housing, which means cracking walls, erratic heating, broken plumbing, rats. It means walk-up tenements where the stairwells reek of urine, and dope addicts nod on the steps. It means dirt, noise, and chaos. Any ghetto dweller can furnish horror stories on the subject of ghetto housing. Herb Goro records some of these stories in *The Block* (1970, pp. 44, 84, 85):

> Listen, I've had rats falling in my bathtub. I had to go and buy four big rattraps and i've caught as high as nine big rats. Not mice, rats. Rats that cats would be afraid to tackle. We had to nail down traps so the rats won't take them away. And they were pulling and pulling, and I have found them when they strangled themselves to death. I saved some to show the landlord when he came in. I had the exterminator, but he didn't do nothing. He'd come in and put a little mice feed and spray a little bit and leave. And every night you hear the rats fighting.
>
> When they raised our rent, water was leking down from the sink all over the pots and pans. The ceiling in the kitchen was all out. Also in the living room, the ceiling was falling and it finally fell and hit our little girl.
>
> In the wintertime we walked around the house with our coats on. We have to put the babies in two pairs of pants, long pants and heavy jackets to try to keep them warm. At night when we

> go to bed, we go to bed with all our clothes on . . . when it's real cold, we close off the two bedrooms completely and burn the oven and then we sleep in here together. I have to put a board and nail it down because I have no connecting doors in this apartment. . . . We have no closets in here. . . .

To be poor means to be overcrowded, to live in two or three rooms with seven, eight, ten other people. A ghetto child seldom has a bed to himself, let alone a room of his own. The poor live without privacy, as Herbert Kohl saw when he invited some of his Harlem students to his one-room apartment. The children were enchanted with his apartment and entranced with the idea that he lived *all alone*. These youngsters, who had never in their lives had space to call their own, saw their teacher's one-room home as a haven of peace and privacy. However much loneliness a ghetto child experiences psychologically, he almost never enjoys the simple human pleasure of being *physically* alone now and then.

Ghetto children are not only inadequately but badly fed, for the most part. They drink coke more often than milk, eat candy and potato chips oftener than meat and vegetables. Their meals are irregular; they go to school without breakfast, eat where and what they can during the day. As Dick Gregory writes in his autobiography, ***Nigger*** (1964), "There was never any mealtime in our house. If you were there, you ate. Grab a hot dog, a piece of baloney, bread, and run out again." The lives of slum children are often without pattern or regularity.

Poor diet leads to poor health and a low level of energy for everyday tasks. The President's Commission on Income Maintenance (1969) notes that "the health problems of the poor are not invisible. The glazed eyes of the children, legs that never grew straight, misshapen feet, sallow complexions, lackluster hair, are easily recognized by even an untrained observer." The Report of the Commission goes on to point out that some less visible results of poor nutrition, such as low energy levels, are not so readily recognized and are often seen as laziness and stupidity by those who deal with poor children.

Dick Gregory (David 1968, p. 249) has described that experience in ***Growing Up Black:***

> The teacher thought I was stupid. Couldn't spell, couldn't read, couldn't do arithmetic. Just stupid. . . . You couldn't concentrate because you were so hungry, because you hadn't had any breakfast. All you could think about was noontime, would it ever come? Maybe you could sneak into the cloakroom and steal a bite of some kid's lunch out of a coat pocket. A bit of something. Paste. You can't really make a meal of the paste, or put it on bread for a sandwich, but sometimes I'd scoop a few spoonfuls out of the paste jar in the back of the room . . . Paste doesn't taste too bad when you're hungry.

Many teachers know very well what the lassitude of their students means, but they can do little about it and must try to teach in spite of it.

> It's Monday . . . the worst day, so violent and deadening are the week-ends in which these often malnourished and sick children have dribbled away hours of their strength on TV, movies, sitting on curbs. Some are now sucking their thumbs, others peeping aloud or talking to themselves. But mostly they're just sitting and staring, mouths dropped open and left there. . . . They are utterly exhausted.

As this passage indicates (Green and Ryan 1965, p. 11), the physical environment of the slum can deal a numbing blow to the mind and emotions of a child. The experiences of the ghetto child erect a formidable barrier to normal curiosity and ability to learn. Robert Coles, Harvard research psychiatrist, has taken exception to the common belief that cultural deprivation means a *lack* of experience. Quite the opposite, say Coles and Piers (1969, p. 167); slum children are made numb by over-stimulation:

> Poor children do not, as a rule, suffer from a lack of experiences, certainly not from a lack of sensory experiences. On the contrary, they tend to be helpless victims of a veritable onslaught on their sensorium . . . crowded tenements make it impossible to escape the incessant sound of human voices, the smells, the skin contacts, sexual acts, fighting, and other manifestations of violence. Frequently the slum child's inability to learn, and to be spontaneously interested in his environment, stems from a barrage of stimuli he cannot deal with, not from a deficit that can be made up by added stimuli. It is the tragedy of the slum child that he is surrounded by printed words but *cannot see*, by blaring radios and domestic noises *but cannot listen.*

And the experience of teachers in Harlem schools bears him out: one teacher (Green and Ryan 1965, p. 12) describes the reading lesson of a fourth-grade child, quite bright:

> When her eyes lift, they contain the week-end: eight people in two rooms reeking with fried food . . . at the end of four flights up. Babies, curses, TV, mumbling, the people sitting as if drunk or dead, or else screaming shrill abuse.

Another (Haskins 1969, p. 9) relates similar experiences:

> Monday is always a hard day for everyone who works; it seems additionally difficult for those of us who teach. . . . [The children] have a lot to say about their weekend—fires, stabbings, the police, etc. Usually the assignment is to let them tell the class "what happened on my block over the weekend. . . ."
>
> Wilbert saw a man cut to death on the corner of Eighth Avenue and 130th Street. He was very upset; telling about the incident, he talked rapidly and stuttered.

The poor suffer, too, from a breakdown of family structure. Divorce rates are higher among the poor than among the well-off; higher for the little-educated than for the highly educated. It is a commonplace that ghetto

families are often fatherless; in central Harlem, for instance, only half the youngsters under 18 live with both parents. This can be a disaster for the children of these families, especially the boys.

One ghetto youth, discussing the high crime rate among the adolescent boys of his neighborhood, echoes the observations of many psychologists (Goro 1970, pp. 130–131):

> They [the boys] have to make it for themselves 'cause most of them don't have fathers. . . . It's a lonely feeling 'cause a lot of times you want to lean on somebody; you need somebody that could try and talk to you and tell you certain things. The problems that I have I can't, you know, express them to my mother 'cause a lot of times she don't understand it.

Even families with both parents present are often disorganized. The pressures of poverty, and too-large families, the violence and chaos of ghetto life are reflected in parental behavior toward children. Jim Haskins (1969, pp. 41, 81, 110), teacher in a ghetto school, gives a glimpse of the home lives of his students:

> Most of my students continue to come in late; "My mother slept late," run most of the excuses.
>
> They don't usually have their homework. "My mother told me to shut up and watch TV when I asked her to help me" is a typical excuse. When I do confront the parents they tell me they are too tired after work, even though I know many have no jobs. Perhaps they mean "tired" from working at home, from struggling with three or four younger children, from trying to exist without money or opportunities. Many parents, however, do work, late into the night and then come home to prepare meals. . . .
>
> Helen told me she has six younger brothers and sisters. She's ten years old and has to help her mother clean up and wash dishes, so she does not have time to do her homework.
>
> Sidney came to school today bruised on his arms and legs. He said his mother and father both whipped him because he broke a cigarette lighter. The parents had gone visiting, leaving him at home alone. He said they were "kind of drunk" when they returned.

The disorganization of slum family life exists in juxtaposition to an active street life which offers to slum youngsters what their homes often do not; that is, structure, a code of right and wrong, a chance of recognition and a way to make money. The pull of street life in the ghetto is very strong very early in a child's life. And the ghetto mother, struggling, often alone, to hold her child against it, frequently loses the battle. By the time he is six or seven, the slum child is beginning to slip away from home control. By the time he is 12 or 13, he may be entirely on his own a good part of the time, a full-fledged member of street life, often already a thief or a dealer in drugs.

A policeman in East Bronx, New York, says (Gore 1970, p. 24):

> I'd say that from the age of nine, ten, up—they don't know what supervision is. Parental supervision. They're allowed to stay out in that street, and it starts in June and it'll end around September, except the weekends. The weekends they'll still be out there, until three, four and five o'clock in the morning—even in the winter—either sniffing glue, smoking pot, and some of them are eleven, some of them are twelve years old.
>
> Some of the glue sniffers around here are anywhere between ten and fourteen. They must sleep in the hallways all night long. I don't think they ever go home. . . .
>
> I know kids on this street and probably I care more about them than their father and mother do. Nobody cares about them, and that's why you can't blame the kid. No boy was born bad. No girl was born bad.

All in all, the physical and emotional environment of the urban ghetto exacts a fearful price from its children. Coles and Piers (1969, pp. 34–35) have drawn a portrait of the contrasting experience of ghetto and middle-class children in the world beyond their homes, pointing out how profound are the consequences for the growing child of the quality of his "extended home," that is, the community in which he lives:

> When the ghetto child leaves for school, he finds himself in a world of alleyways and broken glass; of addicts, alcoholics, pimps; of idle, bitter men who sit about with little hope for themselves. But when the middle-class child goes to school he is welcomed by the grownups along his path. . . .
>
> The supportive relationship of the environment to the middle-class child is as clear as the antagonistic environment faced by the ghetto child. What this does to character formation is revealed, for instance, in play . . . ghetto children's play reflects the discontinuity between the family and the outside world. It is more disruptive, more violent, less formal and ritualistic [than the middle-class child's]. Above all, it takes place in an environment that is itself chaotic.
>
> A child of any background can symbolize and identify with people and institutions. If a slum child sees . . . how broken down the buildings are, how unswept the school corridors, how old the textbooks—then this child picks up the sense of worthlessness decreed by the larger society.
>
> In contrast, consider the middle-class child who looks around him and sees a well-cared for world—clean schoolrooms and corridors, well-cultivated shrubbery. . . . These things help to foster his self-respect and integrity, a sense of being cared for and cared about. A dirty, ugly environment reinforces the ghetto child's sense of worthlessness. . . .

Bob Teague, in his thoughtful and poignant book for his son, ***Letters to a Black Boy*** (1968, pp. 77–78), looked back to his own growing up in Milwaukee and described the "shadow" world of a ghetto child:

> I can remember many afternoons of walking with my barefoot playmates to the edge of the ghetto and watching white youngsters, from a distance, in the beautiful residential neighborhood that hemmed us in. Those kids had shoes. And more important, they had roller skates, bicycles, wagons, cowboy suits and a whole world of things that we could only simulate with odd pieces of junk, old broom handles and active imaginations. One of our favorite games was to pick a particular white youngster that we could pretend to be, sharing from a distance his triumphs in the skating races, the wagon races or in the chase in Cowboys and Indians. Theirs was the real world, we felt. Ours was only a shadow. And we knew it would never change.

Most slum children do not expect, any more than Teague did, that their world will change. Like most human beings, they adapt to their surroundings by becoming like them. The values of slum children are shaped by their experience in the slum—and will most likely be slum values. A child who has known violence all his life will likely become violent; if he grows up among thieves, he will probably become a thief. So the patterns of slum life are self-perpetuating, as one ghetto youth makes very clear in Lee Rainwater's account (1970, p. 288):

> To live around bums, you have to be a bum. Wherever you live you have to have friends, and if you have friends you want to be around them, and if your friends steal—you know money is kind of tempting and if they get money you is going to want some of that money and they is not going to give you any if you is not any help. As you grow up you learn things and as you learn them you think you can get away with everything. And when you get caught it don't mean much . . . and you keep stealing as you go along.

A young Puerto Rican Negro quoted in Charles Silberman's ***Crisis in Black and White*** (1964, p. 288) elaborated on the theme of adaptation in the ghetto:

> In Scarsdale, the first thing the kids learn are how to read and write; that's taken for granted. In my neighborhood, the first things the kids learn are how to fight and steal and not take any crap from anyone. We grow up knowing about narcotics, I mean we don't even remember when we didn't know about them. . . .

It is hard for an outsider to appreciate how relentless are the conditions of the slum, how trapped the slum child is. It is never easy and often it is quite impossible for him to follow a way of life that would be normal and productive in another community.

In ***The Schoolchildren*** (Green and Ryan 1965, pp. 208–11), a Harlem teacher records her conversation with some fourth-grade boys about the hazards of selling papers in their neighborhood:

MALCOLM: . . . Ernie said he's quitting anyway. He was saving for that deep-sea pole, but three times in a month the big boys took everything. He say, "Why should I go out in the cold, lose it all. Even if I get to my house, they get me."

TEACHER: But can't you put your money in your shoe?

(Children laugh.)

MALCOLM: You can't put it nowhere. They take off your shoes, your socks; they get in your underwear; they want everything. Don't dare come from the store with groceries, like you got any money left. They go every place on you . . .

TEACHER: But you can't let them take it! You have to fight back, defend yourselves!

VERNON: You kiddin? They sniffin glue. You can't mess with a sniffer! Glue tear your lungs out. A sniffer's *wild*. . . .

Teacher, you don't mean wrong, I know, but you don't know what it's like around here. It's just not the same as where you live. This is nothing against New York; a lot of parts are nice, but we got the bad part, around here.

For the ghetto child, the slum is a battleground where his human drive to live positively and hopefully is daily pitted against the blight of his environment.

Finally, most of the inner-city poor suffer the burden of racial discrimination. American ghetto-dwellers are mostly black, sometimes Puerto Rican or Mexican-American. Racial discrimination tends to lock these people into poverty, making the future as bleak and unpromising for them as the present. Bob Teague (1968, p. 19) tells his son:

> I cannot forget that the black skin you got from me will force you to waste a king-size slice of your lifetime climbing invisible barriers, imagining other barriers where none exist, fending off affronts—real and imagined—to your dignity, proving that you are human, disproving that you are inferior, living down stereotypes, protesting injustice, choking down helpless rage, waiting for freedom, and adjusting to the knowledge that you will still be waiting when you die. All those distractions, of course, will rob you of more time and energy than any man can afford to lose from his search for personal fulfillment, from learning to help, to share, to build, to laugh, to dream, to love.

And Charles Silberman has written in ***Crisis in Black and White*** (1970, p. 49):

> There is a special quality to the despair of the Negro slum that distinguishes it from any other. For the youngster grow-

> ing up in Harlem or any other Negro slum, the gates of life clang shut at a terrifying age. . . . The children become aware almost from infancy of the opprobrium Americans attach to color. They feel it in their parents' voices as they are warned to behave when they stray beyond the ghetto's wall. They become aware of it as they begin to watch television, or go to the movies, or read the mass-circulation magazines. . . . They learn to feel ashamed of their color as they learn to talk. . . .

For the children of minority races, racial prejudice is an enormous obstacle to growing up in hope and health.

What it means to grow up in an inner-city slum is best told by the autobiographies of those who have lived it. Claude Brown's ***Manchild in the Promised Land*** (1965), Dick Gregory's ***Nigger*** (1964), the ***Autobiography of Malcolm X,*** Piri Thomas' ***Down These Mean Streets*** (1967)—all these tell tales of childhoods warped by poverty and racial hate.

The foreword to Claude Brown's book tells of the migration of the poorest people of the South, the Southern sharecroppers, into New York City in the 1940's. They came because they had been told that in the North, Negroes "lived in houses with bathrooms, electricity, running water, and indoor toilets. To them, this was the 'promised land' that Mammy had been singing about in the cotton fields for many years."

What they found when they got to New York was something less than they had dreamed of. The promised land was a slum ghetto. "There were too many people full of hate and bitterness crowded into a dirty, stinky, uncared-for closet section of a great city."

The book Claude Brown wrote about his own boyhood years is the story of the children of these betrayed migrants to the North. It is a bitter tale. "The children of these disillusioned colored pioneers inherited the total lot of their parents—the disappointments, the anger. To add to their misery, they had little hope of deliverance. For where does one run to when he's already in the promised land?"

Like so many ghetto children, Brown escaped from an unsatisfactory home into the harsh but fascinating life of the street. His involvement with street life began early. When he was 8 years old, he described himself as coming home "after a busy day of running from the police, truant officer, and storekeepers." At that tender age, he was staying away from home for "weeks at a time." When he was 10, Brown was caught robbing a store and sent to Youth House. But Youth House had small effect as a reforming institution. Brown liked it: "It was just like being out on the street, only better, because I could do everything I wanted to do—steal, fight, curse, play, and nobody could take me and put me anywhere. I was already in the only place they could put me."

By 13, Brown was thoroughly experienced in making his way on the street. His knowledge of Harlem life included gang wars, pot smoking, sophisticated stealing, and dope pushing. About that time, he was shot in the stomach while taking part in a robbery and came close to dying. He survived, however, and at 15, ran a successful extortion business. At 16, he was even

more successful selling the "best pot in town." He made good money and left home forever.

The only thing untypical in Brown's experience was that he eventually got out and became a law student at a major American university. Ironically, it was in part the very precocity of his life of the street that enabled him to get free of the ghetto's chains at last. Having made his reputation at 12 and 13, he felt no need at 15 and 16 to use heroin to prove himself when everyone else did, and so escaped the drug addiction that swallowed up so many of his peers. On his own at 16, he knew that his next arrest would give him the criminal record he had avoided up to that time. Yet his dealings in drugs meant that sooner or later, if he continued, he would have to kill someone. When he was robbed by a junkie, the issue was clearly before him; no drug dealer who could be robbed was either safe or respected. So at 17, Brown decided to retire from street life and go back to school.

From this time on, the story is of his gradual disengagement from Harlem life, overlaid with the sympathy he retained for those he was leaving behind. Their fates—mostly addiction, jail, and death—were nearly his.

The book Claude Brown wrote about growing up in Harlem in the 1950's is a better guide to an understanding of city ghetto life even today than all the sociological studies ever produced on the subject. There has been change since his growing up, but not enough to break the cycle of poverty and despair that he pictured so vividly. As every recent study shows, Brown's description still stands as representative. Here are people, coping or succumbing, according to their strength or their luck, with unbelievable handicaps of environment and experience. Here police statistics, welfare reports, school evaluations, come to life. Reading this, no one can wonder at how many of these people fail or turn to crime and drugs. One only wonders how those who survive or surmount the experience find the strength.

The warmth and courage that pulse through Dick Gregory's autobiography provide a glimpse of the answer. He dedicated his book to his mother, who would never admit to being poor—"just broke," a more temporary condition. He wrote (1964, p. 25):

> Like a lot of Nego kids, we never would have made it without our Momma. When there was no fatback to go with the beans, no socks to go with the shoes, no hope to go with tomorrow, she'd smile and say: "We ain't poor, we're just broke." Poor is a state of mind you never grow out of, but being broke is just a temporary condition. She always had a big smile, even when her legs and feet swelled from high blood pressure and she collapsed across the table with sugar diabetes. You have to smile twenty-four hours a day, Momma would say. If you walk through life showing the aggravation you've gone through, people will feel sorry for you, and they'll never respect you. She taught us that man has two ways out of life—laughing or crying. There's more hope in laughing. . . .

She told her son that he was destined for greatness, and he must have believed her. He became a track star in high school, which brought him the scholarships to go on to college—an unheard-of development in his family.

In college, he was captain of the cross-country team, captain of the track team, fastest half-miler in the school's history, drummer in the orchestra and marching band, Outstanding Athlete of 1953. After 2 years in the Army, he embarked on the difficult path to success via show business. Success, any success, was a long struggle for a poor black boy in the 1950's, but Gregory was sustained by his truly astounding determination, his own wit and intelligence, and always by the aboundless faith, coming first from his mother, then from his wife.

Clearly, as both Brown's and Gregory's autobiographies prove, it is possible to overcome the handicaps of poverty and discrimination. As Robert Coles (1969) has said, "Neither the poor nor the wealthy have a monopoly on psychological strengths. . . . Poor people can maintain their warmth and devotion to one another against desperate odds."

The genuine survivors of ghetto life—that is, those who come through with identity intact, with faith in life and mankind and with a capacity for accomplishment—these few are strong and remarkable people. Like steel that has been tempered in flame, they have a special flexible strength. Claude Brown (1965) has said, "despite everything that Harlem did to our generation, I think it gave something to a few. It gave them strength that couldn't be obtained anywhere else."

But the odds are indeed desperate. All through such books as ***Manchild in the Promised Land*** and ***Down These Mean Streets*** are the stories of the losers, those who went under with drugs, violence, and crime:

> Most of the cats I came up with were in jail or dead or strung out on drugs. (***Manchild,*** p. 179)
>
> Danny had been strung out for about four years. I guess he felt that he didn't have much going for him. His folks had cut him loose; he couldn't go home. None of his relatives wanted him coming by. He was ragged all the time. He'd been in and out of jail. He'd been down in Kentucky a couple of times for the cure. He'd been to a place called Brothers Island. He'd been a whole lot of places for a cure. He'd caused everybody a whole lot of trouble. He felt that life was over for him. (***Manchild,*** p. 177)
>
> "What's happened to Tito?"
>
> "Tito's doin' time, baby, doin' a lot of time in Sing Sing." (***Manchild,*** p. 380)
>
> "How ya been, Carlito? What's nuevo?"
>
> I looked up at him and dug the sad answer. "Nada new, 'side's being strung out." . . . I nodded: "Strung out, Carlito?" "Twelve bolsas. . . . Like at five cents a bag an' a bean for works, that's some bread." I made mental figures and my junkie panin needed seventy-two dollars a day to keep from coming apart—to just stay normal. Something I was doing for nothing. (***Down These Mean Streets,*** p. 311)
>
> When I got in the house . . . the phone rang. Mama was on the other end. . . . I said, "What, Mama?" She just blurted it

> out, . . . "Sonny Boy, Tony is dead." . . . I said, "Mama, where? . . . How did he die? Damn, Mama, Tony was only twenty-three or twenty-four." . . . Mama said, "They found him in the backyard. . . . Dead. . . . He died from that dope." (***Manchild,*** pp. 413–414)

> Danny and I talked about people who had come up in the neighborhood. It seemed as though most of the cats we'd come up with just hadn't made it. Almost everybody was dead or in jail. . . . The plague wave had come, and we were in its path. It just swept through and then it was gone. It took a lot of people with it. (***Manchild,*** p. 419)

The plague Brown speaks of is heroin. In the Harlem of the 1950's, he says, "Heroin had just about taken over. . . . It seemed to be a kind of plague. . . . Drugs were killing just about everybody off in one way or another. It had taken over the neighborhood, the entire community. I didn't know of one family in Harlem with three or more kids between the ages of fourteen and nineteen in which at least one of them wasn't on drugs. This is just how it was."

Narcotic addiction was known in this country long before the 1950's, of course, but the problem was relatively small until that time. After World War II, however, two conditions necessary for widespread narcotic addiction came together in the ghetto areas of American cities: the availability of narcotics and a population of people whose deprivation and despair made them likely candidates for addiction. These people were most typically the adolescent boys of minority races who lived in an urban ghetto.

In the 1950's, New York was the city most acutely afflicted by the plague. New York's police department estimated that approximately 5,000 new addicts came to their attention each year in that decade. And adolescents were the main victims of the new wave of narcotic addiction.

But if New York was the worst, it was not the only city that developed a drug problem in the decade of the 50's. Every State with large city slums and socially deprived youngsters began to report major problems with narcotics. By 1959, New York had the largest addict population, with 43 percent of the national total, but Illinois followed with 16 percent, California with 11 percent, Michigan with 6 percent. In every case, it was in the slum areas populated by minorities that the problem was greatest.

The decade of the 60's saw an extension of the same pattern. Narcotics abuse generally rose, in the United States, but the number of addicts in minority groups continued to be disproportionate to their numbers in the population. Federal Bureau of Narcotics figures show that drug addiction is still increasing rapidly among Negroes and Americans of Puerto Rican and Mexican origin who live in the central cities of large metropolitan areas. In 1969, for instance, about 49 percent of all narcotic addicts reported were Negro, though this group constitutes only about 11 percent of the total population.

Dr. Donald Louria, president of the New York State Council on Drug Addiction and author of ***The Drug Scene*** (1968), has said, "Narcotics abuse

increasingly involves younger persons residing in ghetto areas of our large urban centers. Half the known addicts are under age thirty and growing numbers are under age twenty. In the last year [1968, when Louria was writing] there had been a veritable epidemic of heroin abuse in those 16 years and under. . . ."

The connection between heroin addiction and urban ghetto life is well documented by now. According to the careful study of teenage narcotic addicts in New York City by Isidor Chein and his associates, narcotic addiction is tied to the whole spectrum of the slum environment. Poverty is a factor, but only one factor among others. In ***The Road to H,*** Chein, et al. (1964, p. 74) have written:

> The vulnerability of teen-aged males in New York City to the lure of narcotics is in the main associated in some fashion with living in areas of economic squalor, but other unwholesome aspects of the social environment also contribute in substantial measure. That is, conditions of economic squalor dominate the picture, but virtually the entire complex of unwholesome factors plays a contributory role. . . . As usual, social causation is a complex affair.

Scientists and sociologists and ex-addicts all agree: the world of the urban ghetto is a dreadful place to live, and a worse place to try to grow up. The report of the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children (1970, p. 126) makes the connection in neutral, official language:

> For low-income groups the pressures of poverty, discrimination, the slum situation, and the culture of disorganized neighborhoods all play a part in creating addictions. This is shown by the fact that the epidemic areas in New York City, where drug use is very high, are relatively concentrated settlements of disadvantaged minority groups, mainly Negroes and Puerto Ricans. These areas are marked by poverty, unemployment, disorganized family life, dense population, and highly crowded housing.

Ives Kron (1965, p. 181), psychoanalyst and specialist in narcotic addiction, has underlined the desire for sheer escape that narcotic use represents:

> Narcotics use is suicidal. The addict has given up the fight for expanded selfhood and abandoned the struggle for a personal identity, both sexual and social. He flirts with death, and frequently succeeds in engaging it by "accident." Every injection is a re-experience of the feeling of imminent death, followed by the triumph of being alive. His living death, beyond pain, is neither life nor death, neither dream nor sleep, but only escape.

What observers have seen, nearly every addict recognizes also. An addict describes the escape, so temporary but so irresistible: "Once you're high you don't have to worry about anything . . . just sit back and all your problems are gone for a few hours and that's it." Or, as Malcolm X said, "Every junkie is running away from something."

What there is to run from, the children of the ghetto understand only too well. The tragedy of their own lives is not lost on them nor the contrast between their world and the rest of American society. They understand how things are, they only wonder why. No one has ever put the case more eloquently than the East Harlem fourth-grader in ***The Schoolchildren*** (Green and Ryan 1965, p. 213) who said:

> It's funny, I don't understand. If God knows everything and he knowed it would be like this, why did he let you be borned anyway? When God birthed you, you were sweet and dear. But before he can turn around, he sees a bum has growed up. Even he doesn't know how it happened. But I guess it happens just around here.

Chapter III

GROWING UP IN THE SUBURBS

When you get
So bored
You begin to see
The Blankness
And you
Drink, take drugs,
Or get married.
You do something like that
You need something to label you
To pretend
You are Something
For some Reason

From: "Long Winter" (poem) by Nancy Ernst, high school student, in ***How Old Will You Be in 1984?***, p. 230

By comparison with the overwhelming problems of inner-city life, growing up in the suburbs would seem to be nearly idyllic. And on comparative terms, certainly it is. Suburban children are generally protected and well cared for. They have more than enough to eat, to wear, and to own. Some are affluent; indeed, all are materially rich beyond measure, compared to the slum child.

Suburbs, it should be pointed out, are not all the same. There are wealthy suburbs, where nearly everyone over 16 seems to have his own car, his own stereo, and firm plans for college. There are also many less wealthy suburbs, in which life is comfortable but not conspicuously affluent, where fewer youngsters look forward to college and most expect to lead the working-class lives their parents have lived. There are old suburbs, with business districts, libraries, and community centers, and newer suburbs which contain almost nothing but houses and cars.

But suburbs do share certain general characteristics. They tend to be one-class, quite homogeneous racially, economically, and socially, and isolated from the life of whatever city they border. One journalist has described suburbs as "comfortably monotonous bedroom communities where there are almost no old people, no poor, no childless, no Negroes, either many Jewish families or none, no sidewalks, no places to explore except by mother-chauffered car, no houses or incomes too different from those of [one's own family]." Certainly, the lives led by children in any suburb resemble one another far more closely than they resemble the lives of inner-city children.

The homogeneity of suburban life is buttressed by the modern dependence on the car. The 1970 report of the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children (1970, p. 143) discussed the peculiar isolation of the suburban family:

> Many new suburban areas have developed without regard to family needs. Many have no sidewalks and no public transportation systems. The car becomes a necessity to reach the school, shopping centers, recreational areas, and medical services. It becomes almost impossible for any member of the family to engage in community life without a car to get him there. . . . In effect, many suburbanites have become slaves to the freeways and the automobile. These concrete barriers, together with mounting social anonymity, breed a sense of alienation and distance from neighbors and a sense of fear and distrust of the surrounding community. . . .

Suburban teenagers complain that suburbs offer them "no place to go," and it is quite true. It is hard for adults to realize, perhaps, how physical space has contracted around youngsters in the past few decades. It is apparent enough in towns and cities; vacant lots, where kids once played unorganized pick-up ball, are mostly gone now, built over, or parked upon. Streets are too busy to be turned into informal playgrounds and city yards are too small.

But suburbs, which look so green and spacious to the adult eye, are often equally frustrating to a growing child's need for space and privacy. There is often no place to play, no place to be alone, no place to throw a ball without breaking a window or an ordinance. There may be plenty of trees but none to climb, lots of grass, but no scruffy fields for impromptu football. Above all, there is little room for real privacy, no place that doesn't belong to somebody. The moody, uneven years of preadolescence and adolescence are hard to get through without the physical space in which just to let go—run, shout, laugh, cry.

Places city children of another generation took for granted do not always exist in suburbs. Skating rinks, art galleries, even Y's and libraries, are often not available in suburbs, affluent or not. The son of the man who spent every Saturday afternoon of his 14th year in the local movie house cannot follow in his father's footsteps. Assuming there is a movie theater in his suburban area, it certainly doesn't offer a change of feature as often as once a week and very likely not even one of every five films is suitable for a 14-year-old. Suburban young people find few places where they are welcome to con-

gregate and fewer still where they can do something of interest to themselves. Many communities have no teen centers at all and few have enough to answer the needs of their young population. Though there are exceptions, it is generally true that today's suburbs lack the richness, the variety, and the constant contact with adult activity that cities afford growing children.

Psychologically, perhaps the greatest single difference between the lives of the inner-city and the suburban child lies in their expectations for the future. The probability is enormously strong that the future life of each will accurately reflect his past. This means that the child who has grown up poor will very likely continue to be poor all his life. If his education is limited, as it is for most of the poor, his prospects of moving up and out of poverty are equally limited.

For the suburban, middle-class child, the same formula holds. His economic security as a child tends to assure his economic security as an adult. His education is likely to be at least as extended as that of his parents, perhap more so. And higher education makes a predictable difference in lifetime income. (President's Commission on Income Maintenance 1969).

> Limited education does not guarantee a life of poverty; but the income distribution is highly skewed in favor of the more educated. One-fourth of those with less than eight years of schooling earned less than $3,000 while only 6 percent of high school graduates had earnings that low. In 1967, the median income of families whose heads had completed less than eight years of schooling was about one third that of families headed by college graduates. The gap between their median incomes was about $8,000.

In short, unlike the slum child, the middle-class young person is natural heir to what is conventionally known as "a future."

But, as the oldest of old sayings has it, "Money can't buy happiness." And this is demonstrably the case with suburban children. For all their evident advantages, it is clear that many find growing up difficult and sometimes impossible. As one working paper of the 1970 White House Conference on Children (p. 23–3) observed:

> Even children showered with material things can be deprived of love, proper guidelines for living, self-discipline, respect for others, understanding of the need for authority, a meaningful education, and a sense of self-worth. Those who lack these basic needs are either in trouble or may well be on the edge of trouble.

Oddly enough, the very fact that the suburban child has a "future" is a large part of his trouble with the present. Many of the suburban youngsters who are most fortunate—materially speaking—are heavily burdened by their parents' expectations of them. These are the children who live always under the shadow of parental ambition, and who face academic and social demands that they can neither meet nor resist. These are the children who are tested, examined, pushed, and labeled long before they reach high school. These are the children who are reminded again and again in

junior high school that only very good grades will get them into the "college of their choice." No parent means to drive his child into nervous distraction with relentless pressure and over-concern for success. But parents, perhaps especially suburban parents, are ambitious for their children. When they see the colleges becoming more crowded with every passing year, and note that admissions standards are moving ever upward as more and more high school graduates want to go on to college, they feel they must enhance their own youngster's chances in whatever way they can. And so they press their children to make maximum effort.

A suburban mother is quoted in Eda LeShan's book, ***The Conspiracy Against Childhood*** (1967, pp. 15–16):

> I am really frightened by what I see happening to my children. We live in a middle class area with high pressure parents who are pushing their children unmercifully. Any child who isn't reading "two years above grade level" feels like a moron. Last year a high school girl died of colitis. She was an honor student, but nothing she did was ever enough. Because she was talented her parents made her feel that she could never let up for a single minute. I have a friend whose 14-year-old has begun to lose all her hair. The doctor says it's tension, so they took her out of the advanced class. Her hair stopped falling out, but she gets nauseous every morning before school—she's ashamed to admit that she couldn't take the pace, in front of the other kids. And that isn't the only kind of pressure. A junior high school in our neighborhood just announced that all the 7th graders going to the school dances had to go in couples—the girls with escorts, no one coming stag. In other words, the school itself is insisting on a dating pattern for 12 and 13-year-olds. I don't know where it will all end.

It ends, in some cases, in rebellion and withdrawal, in that cynicism toward adult values that we have come to include in the term "generation gap." It ends, too, in an enormous sense of frustration and in a rejection of the whole pressure-cooker approach to education. In the highly competitive atmosphere of middle-class schools, according to adult and student critics, grades, rather than learning, become the goal. One high school student stated the point this way (Divoky 1969, p. 94):

> The average student has a tremendous amount of pressure put on him to get good grades. The grade seems more important than the knowledge. Many students study hard because they are taught by their parents to want to enter college, even though they may not be able to do the work. Their long hours of cramming may result in a good test grade but cannot give the student knowledge.

Some youngsters do accept the values parents put on education and still resist the pushing so common in middle-class suburbs. Another high schooler put it (Divoky 1969, p. 88):

> Don't get me wrong. Education is great. In fact, it's the

> greatest thing that happens to a person. I'm in favor of compulsory education so long as the fact that it's compulsory aids somebody or makes a real difference. But you can't make a guy learn just by the fact that he has to learn. . . . If you want him to learn, there should be no reason for compulsion. You can say, look man, there's society waiting to grab you: education can help prepare you for it—take advantage of it. That's great. But you can't say, "Look, man, there is society waiting to grab you, but education's gonna grab you first and shove something down your throat we call knowledge: take it or leave it as long as you sit through it all." That does no one a bit of good.

As this youngster points out, the pressures very often transmute or even obliterate the original goal. A high school editor says: "I think a lot of them feel that they're being educated not for themselves, not for their own knowledge, but to become a part of the mechanism of society." Pressure to maintain high grades does NOT necessarily result in knowledge or understanding or the ability to think clearly.

Similarly, early social pressures often backfire, producing the 16-year-old who is bored with all the usual (and legitimate) social activities available to young people. In suburban high schools, the school dance just doesn't go any more. High schoolers who have gone to school dances regularly since the first year of junior high, or even earlier, crave something more sophisticated.

Parents whose children are dating at 12 and 13 may be nonplussed to find them searching for "new kicks" when they are 16 and 17. One suburban high school counselor said of this early sophistication syndrome: "It comes from the home. They're trying to shove experiences down the kids' throats. By the time some of them hit high school, they're already bored to death socially. . . ."

Finally, adult pressure, whether social or academic, tends to set up standards of attainment that are unrealistically rigid for a growing personality. By these standards, children are then labeled and classified long before they leave their formative years.

Indeed, children are classified relentlessly these days, in schools especially, but outside them as well. They are pressed to "do well" at everything, and whether they do or they don't, they are classified. Those who do achieve are marked as successes—social or academic or athletic—and are thereupon under heavy obligation to uphold their quickly acquired reputation. The child who was a social success at 12 is devastated if his popularity declines at 14. The outstanding athlete of a school of 500 may find it hard to adjust to being second-rate in his next school whose population is 2,000.

Perverse as it may seem to the well-meaning adults who hasten to confirm a child's success, the success label often breeds an exaggerated fear of failure. These are the youngsters for whom no achievement seems to be enough, who cannot seem to reach a firm sense of confidence in themselves. They stagger under the burden of a too-early, too-glittering reputation, always afraid that someone is about to find out that they are not really worthy of of it.

The other side of the story is just as painful. Those who do badly in the competitive world of suburban childhood, or even those who just don't do terribly well, are soon categorized as failures. It isn't that unfeeling adults actually call the children failures, in so many words and to their faces. It is a more subtle process, but just as withering. A child may be told that he "isn't trying" or "isn't concentrating"; he is told that he "can do better"—which lets him know that he isn't doing well enough now, though he may be convinced that he *is* trying and that he cannot do better.

The effect is quite discernible. Child study expert Eda LeShan (1967) has observed that most children enjoy kindergarten and look forward to first grade. But by the end of first grade and the beginning of second, many of the children have begun to perceive themselves as failures. At the end of third grade, the number of children who call themselves failures has doubled.

The trouble is that the competitive structure that surrounds most middle-class children requires that all children be good at the same things, at the same times. The children who do not perform according to the schedule quickly draw their own conclusions about their own inadequacies. The student in middle-class schools is tested and tested. If his scores are good and his school performance is not so good, he is labeled an underachiever. Mrs. LeShan is appalled at the process that presumes to judge a child so long before his growth is complete. She notes that the expectations of school and home have risen steadily over the past decade, and she questions the fairness of asking every child to live up to these demands equally well and on the same schedule (p. 158):

> In the mad rush for academic acceleration more and more nice normal kids are being labeled as underachievers or failures without regard for the change in our expectations. We turn our schools into failure factories, insist that our children grow up according to an entirely new time schedule, demand a much higher level of achievement from nursery school to college—and then wonder why so many intelligent children cannot "live up to their potential!" Whose potential? What kind of potential? A potential for memorizing? A potential for sitting at a desk and doing homework for two hours in sixth grade? A potential for taking tests well?

In all of this, the schools are simply the most visible element in a total pattern of highly competitive living. Competition is in the very air of suburbia. Economically, socially, academically, for themselves and for their children, many suburban parents are competitive in outlook. The judging and sorting of children within middle-class schools is less a peculiarity of the schools than a reflection of community attitudes. Parents *want* their children to be tested and graded, because they want for them the rewards that go with winning. James B. Conant (1961, p. 101) has observed:

> For the majority of parents in the heavily college-oriented suburbs . . . this decision [whether a child will enter a university] is made when they are born. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers frequently hear such statements as, "I don't

> care what you do as long as Johnnie gets into Harvard." The parents are determined that at least the boys, regardless of ability, receive a degree from a college with high academic standards. The pressures mount from that time on through the grades, increasing in severity. . . .

In nonschool activities, as well as in academics, competition dominates. Little League baseball teams, once a symbol of the suburban family's child-centeredness, have come to be a standard example of how parental pressure on kids extends to every phase of their lives—even play. Arrangements are elaborate: everyone has to have a uniform; battered play clothes will not do. Schedules are carefully laid out, teams are extensively—and intensively—coached. Little League games are no games for the sake of playing; they are played to win.

The competition, the pressure, the early sorting of children into categories of success and failure does not take into account the uneven growth that research has shown to be characteristic of childhood. Children do not grow at the same rates, nor does any one child grow at a perfectly steady and predictable rate throughout his childhood. Growing up is uneven and unpredictable, as child psychologists have stressed again and again. Early categorization fails to make room for the lapses into immaturity, the sudden spurts of growth, the side-by-side existence of responsibility and silliness.

Furthermore, the labels so hastily stuck on children are all too often *wrong*. History is full of instructive examples of the fallibility of adult judgment of a child's potential. Isaac Newton and Winston Churchill both moved through school at the bottom of their classes; Churchill was particularly unsuccessful in English. Albert Einstein did not learn to talk until he was four, and he was seven before he learned to read. At 16, he failed the entrance examination for Zurich Polytechnic, and his professor of physics recommended that he try biology or medicine rather than physics. Charles Darwin's school career was notably undistinguished; according to his autobiography, his teachers generally rated him as "rather below the common standard of intellect." Above all, early categorization fails to take into account the effect of the labels themselves on a child's development as a person. Labels are powerful. It is not easy for children to disbelieve them and rise above them. Karl Menninger has commented on the power of labeling to harm physical health: "Diagnostic name-calling may be damning . . . The very word 'cancer' is said to kill some patients who would not have succumbed (so quickly) to the malignancy from which they suffer. . . . We disparage labeling of all kinds in psychiatry. . . ."

If labels can be so decisive to the physical condition of an adult, how much more fateful must they be for the developing personality of a growing child. A high school student asks, "What about the guys we call failures when they're 8 years old? What will they get out of our educational system? Hate and distrust?"

The question he asks is very much to the point, because the evidence is strong that the labels, the categories, the scoring—all the name-calling and the pressures of a competitive society—cost young people dearly. And in

the long run, perhaps the highest costs of excessive pressuring and labeling of children are the various forms of escape children devise to free themselves.

John Holt, teacher and author of ***How Children Fail*** (1964) has observed that "freedom to live and to think about life for its own sake is important and even essential to a child. He will only give so much time and thought to what others want him to do; the rest he demands and takes for his own interests, plans, worries, dreams."

Thus, the child who is under too-heavy pressure to succeed in school may resist, consciously or otherwise, by passivity and "stupidity." The following explanation (Gross and Gross 1969, pp. 74–75) has been given:

> Do children not, to some extent, escape and frustrate the relentless, insatiable pressure of their elders by withdrawing the most intelligent and creative parts of their minds from the scene? Is this not at least a partial explanation of the extraordinary stupidity that otherwise bright children so often show in school? . . . They deny their intelligence to . . . the teachers, not so much to frustrate them but because they have other and more important uses for it.

In-depth studies by Earl S. Schaefer, a child development expert and former NIMH researcher, suggest that adolescent alienation is also a form of escape from anxiety, the anxiety created by the youngster's feeling that the world is a threatening place and that he will be unable to meet the demands made upon him. The detachment of alienation, like the "'stupidity" that Holt observed, may be used as a defense against fear and painful uncertainty. It allows a young person to see himself as separate from any real connection with his world; he becomes an observer rather than a participant, and the failure he so much fears is held off by his refusal to engage in competition.

Even the youngster who elects to conform to the numerous demands of suburban competition often comes to a sense of alienation toward his own efforts. Adult pressure frequently causes a child to see his goals entirely in terms of pleasing adults or of achieving some remote future goal, like getting into college, or holding a good job. For most children, these are unsatisfactory reasons for doing something every day. As Holt has pointed out, the child (or adult) who is learning something *he* wants to know, or practicing a skill *he* wants to acquire, is tireless, patient, never bored with the process. But the child who is practicing or studying under pressure and for reasons not his own becomes, sooner or later, profoundly alienated from the goals of his own activity. In other words, he is bored.

Boredom is, in fact, the most visible expression of the young suburbanite's malaise. Adults are puzzled and irritated by the complaint. After all, these youngsters have had opportunities beyond the dreams of many; they have had music lessons, art lessons, dance and athletic training, the "best" schools. How is it possible for them to be so empty and so bored?

The answer would seem to lie, as Friedenberg (1965*a*, 1965*b*), Goodman (1956, 1962) and others have said, in the lack teenagers feel of a real func-

tion in society. Their cry that "there's nothing to do" is more understandable, perhaps, if it is heard as "there's nothing *essential* to do." Teenagers have proved again and again how well they can respond to situations that call upon them for great effort and responsibility. They have fought forest fires, helped rescue flood victims, manned Civil Air Patrol units, tutored ghetto children, registered voters, and built telescopes in their back yards. They can be and are responsible, energetic, and very capable when they sense that their efforts are really needed. But for most, such times come rarely, if at all. They are not, as they once were, contributors to the family as an economic unit, nor are they as necessary to the running of the home as they once were. Automation and affluence have made children functionless in most middle-class homes.

Parents and educators, of course, look upon a child's schooling as his major job and expect him to understand that his education is a vital function in his own life. But the critics of schools have made it clear that one crucial problem in education today is precisely the divergence of goals between students on the one hand, and schools and parents on the other. Many youngsters see little connection between what the schools and their parents want of them and what they themselves want or need. For many young people, it is true, school achievement does occupy the vital center of life; for many others, however, school is the deepest wedge driven between young and adult. For these disaffected young people, schooling, far from giving them a sense of place in society, convinces them that they are being shelved until some magic moment when they are old enough to take charge of their own lives.

And in fact, the youngster who is hostile or indifferent to school finds few alternatives which give him a sense of self-confidence or help him to find his own identity. He is unable, usually, to work at anything beyond the level of baby-sitting or lawn-mowing, and other nonschool activities. As Paul Goodman (1962, pp. 117–118) observes, he seldom helps very much because adults do not take him seriously:

> The "serious" activity of youth is going to school and getting at least passing grades; all the rest—music, driving, 10 billions annually of teenage commodities, dating, friendships, own reading, hobbies, need for one's own money—all this is treated by adults as frivolous. . . . In fact, of course, these frivolous things are where normally a child would explore his feelings and find his identity and vocation, learn to be responsible; nevertheless, if any of them threatens to interfere with the serious business—it is unhesitatingly interrupted.

So the choices open to the suburban youngster who is entering his teens and beginning to look for ways to define himself are really very few, after all. And each has its hazards. If he accepts school and academic performance as the mainspring of his life, he may find himself hard driven by the pressures on him to excel. If he cannot reach the standards for school success, he may come to see himself as a hopeless failure, long before he reaches maturity.

Many youngsters, of course, find the road to maturity that goes through academic achievement not only acceptable, but rewarding. They are able to balance the stresses of competition with the pleasures of achievement and so to maintain their equilibrium. For the academic, career-oriented youngster, the dependence of adolescence and the pace of keeping up at school are acceptable since he knows where he is going and knows that his present efforts will get him there.

The difficulty comes about because there are so few alternatives to the academic pathway. Working, without a high school diploma, is not a real alternative, apprenticeships are things of the past, vocational schools are tainted with the implication of failure. Thus, if a youngster rejects the framework of success in an academic setting, he may very likely find that he has cut himself adrift from all that adult society is willing to regard as real or serious for persons his age.

To a lesser extent, the same difficult choices exist in his social life. If he begins it early, he may be bored with most of what is available long before he has outgrown his high school years. If he does not, he may well come to believe that he is an outcast or a social misfit.

Far more often than adults realize, youngsters in the early to mid-teen years do feel that they are isolated and aimless. These feelings can terrify children; they don't understand their own boredom or the emptiness of their lives, nor do they believe that things will ever change very much. It is at this point that they may wander into real trouble—with drugs, for instance. And when that happens, their sense of isolation is even more frightening; they are out of their depth and don't know where or how to reach for help.

There is scarcely a better index to the problems of suburban youngsters groping their way through adolescence than the "hot line" services of various suburban counties. The very existence of—and need for—such services testifies to the peculiar lonesomeness of suburban growing up. The hot line service offers only a friendly voice at the other end of a telephone connection; some sympathy; a little, very cautious, advice; perhaps a referral to a more solid form of help. Names are not given nor asked for, and the iron-clad confidentiality is doubtless one of the service's greatest attractions for suburban kids.

To an adult who has known the comfort of a close friend or a sympathetic relative, the hot line form of help might seem impersonal and remote. But to a troubled youngster who has lost (or never had) communication with his parents and who has neither clergyman, friend, nor relative to turn to, the hot line is a rock in a sea of confusion. It may be anonymous, it may be a little remote, but it is *there* when he needs it, and that can be crucial.

The troubles the hot line hears about range from the usual, probably shortlived, crises between kids and parents, or kids and friends, to matters of real desperation, like drug abuse and suicide. A west coast hot line service reports that two-thirds of their calls come from girls whose age is approximately 16 and whose problems include chronic frustration with boy-girl relationships, fears of homosexuality, drugs, and social isolation. One call (quoted in an article on hot lines published in **Seventeen**) is typical enough to stand for many. A 16-year-old girl called in desperate urgency: "I'm on acid

and pills. I want to get off but I don't know how. My boy friend got busted and I'm scared. I was making A's but now I'm flunking out of school. My parents don't know about the drugs yet. I want to get off before they find out . . . yet, I don't want off. . . . They give me something . . . something I need . . . I'm so bored." This youngster's home was an upper-middle-class suburb. She had gotten herself into deep trouble without the knowledge of her parents and —rightly or wrongly—believed they were entirely unaware of her inner turmoil and would be angry if she told them. Hot line was the one source of help she knew about. In this, she is representative of most of hot line's callers.

Many, perhaps most, parents appreciate only dimly, if at all, how difficult growing up can be for the children of suburbia.

The director of the hot line service in Montgomery County, Maryland, finds a failure of communication between parents and children "very common" in the suburbs. Sometimes, she says, it is a failure of affection or of responsibility, but very often it is simply a lack of awareness on the parents' parts of how hemmed in children can feel in the teen-years.

A great many parents therefore fail to make any connection between the lives their children live in a typical suburb and the problem of drug abuse. They tend to look upon drug abuse and the drug culture as a kind of pit into which their children may fall in an unguarded moment. As one parent put it, "My parents had to worry whether I'd get drunk at a dance or get suspended for breaking curfew. I have to worry whether my sons will disappear into some strange offbeat life before they even know what they're leaving behind.

Yet much of the evidence indicates that drug abuse is far more often a symptom of already-existing trouble than a sudden, inexplicable plunge into deviance. The very distance between adult and child that makes a youngster's troubled state of mind invisible to adults—like that of the girl who called hot line—*is* the trouble, in many cases. This is a fact that seems to be more apparent to young people than it is to their parents. They are aware, if their elders are not, of their own isolation within society.

A recent NIMH seminar on drug abuse in which students from several suburban junior high schools served as consultants produced some interesting comments both on the problem of drug abuse and on youthful isolation. The youngsters were asked what they thought about why kids get on drugs. According to the student consultants, most young users say they use drugs for pleasure—"for kicks," because it "feels good." But their student colleagues at the seminar were skeptical about pleasure as the major reason for drug abuse; kids on drugs, they all agreed, were kids with problems.

The discussion then turned to what help was available to a youngster with serious problems. The consultants agreed that for a sympathetic ear, young people could rely on one another and on hot line services. But the teenager in real trouble, especially with drugs, needs more than that, they pointed out. He needs practical advice; he needs the kind of help that only direct contract with adults can give. To whom can he turn?

The answers to this last question revealed the terrible loneliness many adolescents apparently feel. Parents were not mentioned at all. Presumably,

a youngster with problems had problem parents; or perhaps the subject of drugs—if drugs were part of the problem—is too emotional to discuss with parents. Teachers were mentioned as one natural and available source of adult help; could young people talk to teachers? Were any other adults available to help kids in trouble?

The young consultants made it clear that adult help was not nearly so available or as trustworthy as they would wish. For instance, students often trust their teachers as individuals and would like to turn to them for help. But youngsters do *not* trust the structure within which teachers must operate. Middle-class students have no illusions about how much autonomy a teacher has in his professional role; they know that school systems generally make little room for confidentiality between teacher and student. They are, perhaps understandably, wary of entrusting—or burdening—teachers with their personal confidences. "If I tell a teacher I'm on drugs, and he doesn't report it, he might lose his job." "When you talk to a teacher, no matter how great he is, if another teacher comes in—pow—he's just a teacher again."

Even counselors, who are in schools to offer help to kids who need it, are not free of the system, in student opinion: "If I go to the school counselor with a drug problem, doesn't it go on my record?" In short, a teacher as a human being may indeed have the trust of his students. But as teacher, he is part of an institution youngsters emphatically do not trust with their personal problems.

So too is the case with other institutionalized sources of help. The ill-defined status of persons under 18 or 21 makes help and confidentiality hard for them to find. A teenager in trouble and in need of adult aid finds that doctors require parental consent for treatment; clinics and counseling centers keep records; and all of them send bills home. Only hot lines, rap houses, and the rare free clinics ask no awkward questions, present no bills, and keep few records.

The youngster who finds his troubles piling up and who knows of no safe place to turn for help sometimes simply runs away. It is seldom a premeditated move; most leave home with little money and only the clothes they are wearing. Running away is most often a sudden, impulsive, and desperate flight.

Runaway House in Washington, D.C., sees a great many refugees from suburban Maryland and Virginia. "Running away is almost exclusively a middle-class, suburban phenomenon," according to one psychiatric worker there. A psychiatrist who is a volunteer at Runaway House pointed out that, though specific reasons for running away vary greatly, quite often the act results from a youngster's need to put some "psychological distance" between his problems and himself, a distance he cannot achieve at home.

Running away, like drug abuse, this psychiatrist observed, is usually symptomatic of something else. Sometimes it is less the enormity of the troubles—which may be quite ordinary, unremarkable adolescent difficulties—than the immaturity of the youngster that makes running away the chosen solution. Runaways, like most young people, often show uneven development. They are sophisticated in some respects, immature in others. Most of those

who run away do so only once, and one-time runaways, as NIMH studies have shown (Shellow, et al. 1967, p. 55), are not discernibly different in any important way from children who do not run away from home. While running away surely signals unhappiness and at least a temporary excess of stress, it does not necessarily indicate a real desire to break family ties. For some youngsters, running away is more a bid for restraints and guidance than a true grasp at total independence; they may be asking for the help they need and haven't been able to find. Most runaways, according to the Runaway House psychiatrist, are "frightened kids," who really want and need "restriction in a psychologically useful way" from somebody.

These views were echoed in a more general way by Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, well-known Cornell psychologist and chairman of one of the task force groups of the 1970 White House Conference on Children. In an interview reported in *Time* (Dec. 28, p. 37), he said:

> Perhaps when we think we are being permissive, we are really just not paying attention to our kids. Parents have been told by experts like me, "Let your child be himself," and that has been taken to mean: Let him grow up by himself.
>
> But children would not grow up associating only with other children because they haven't much to give to each other.
>
> The important thing is to be brought up by somebody. . . . It is very important for a child that there be a person on the other end of the seesaw, and that each reckons with the other. . . .

Dr. Bronfenbrenner sounded the same theme that Paul Goodman and Edgar Friendenberg have developed, saying, "Our society has become far too age-segregated."

It seems paradoxical that suburbia, where so many families go "for the children," should isolate its children by age-segregation, yet the testimony of experts and of youngsters alike say that it does. It is also a curious paradox that some suburban children, so fortunate in so many obvious ways, so literally the repositories of their parents' fondest hopes, should find themselves drifting and lost, bored, over-pressured and lonely in their growing years. And it is the saddest irony of all that the very hopes and ambitions parents have for these children should serve, in some cases, to drive them into such limbo.

Bored because they feel themselves cut off from the mainstream of society, marooned in a never-never land between real childhood and real maturity, suburban children in the teen years too often find few resources, within or without, to help them develop a firm sense of self. They would recognize, if their elders do not, the truth of a wry remark of Dr. Robert Petersen, Chief of NIMH's Center for Studies of Narcotic and Drug Abuse: "Kids are like new wine. They have no function except to age."

Chapter IV

THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

"American education is in urgent need of reform . . ."
—President Richard M. Nixon
1971 Message on Education Reform

Wherever and however a child grows up, in city or in suburb, in comfort or in poverty, school is a major part of his daily experience. School might fairly be called one of the two centers of a child's life, second only to his home in its influence. School can either offset or intensify a child's home experience; it may, for instance, provide the opportunity for success and accomplishment sorely needed by a child whose home experience has been unrelievedly negative—or it may only be one more place to fail. A school can lead a child to value himself as an individual, or it can teach him to despise himself as a member of some scorned category—"slow reader," "trouble-maker," "vocational student." Whatever the effects of schools for good or ill, their importance can scarcely be overstated. For most children, they are the main contact with the world outside the family, and their role is vital in a child's life.

The success or failure experienced by a youngster in school may be a profound influence on the choices he makes about drug use. Dr. Sidney Cohen, consultant to the National Institute of Mental Health, has said, "If the educator is to learn anything from the current striving for drug-induced perceptual, emotional, and cognitive changes, it is that important areas of human experience have been neglected by our child-rearing and child-teaching practices."

And John Holt (1969, pp. 20–21), a well-known commentator on schools and school failure, follows up Dr. Cohen's point:

> You might say that school is a long lesson in How To Turn Yourself Off, which may be one reason why so many young people, seeking the awareness of the world and responsiveness to it they had when they were little, think they can only find it in drugs.

A sixth grader agrees with these experts in a passage at once muddled and profound (White House Conference on Children 1970, p. 8–6)

> Failure is not good for kids due to the fact that it often tends to develop a mental complex. In his attempt to find success he often experiments with drugs and alcohol. The failure of a kid often leads to an early death because he finds nothing to live for. Success can be measured in terms of enjoyment, and failure can only be measured in terms of disappointment.

Historically, and in the present time, the public school system in the United States has been expected to function as the great equalizer. The task of the free and compulsory school is to insure that every American child emerges from the years of basic schooling equally well equipped to take on the responsibilities of citizenship and the opportunities of American society. The intent of the "common schools" from their beginning has been to provide a common experience, as well as the skills of reading and writing and a store of fundamental knowledge adequate for nonacademic needs and sufficient to provide a basis for higher education. Horace Mann, the father of the public school system in the United States, in 1848 described the common school as "a great equalizer of the conditions of men. . . . It does better than disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich: It prevents being poor." In short, the American public school system is meant to be a *democratic* instrument, in the service of both the society and the individual. For the individual, the schools are meant to provide the education which will enable him to take advantage of the opportunities of his society. For the society, the schools are expected to turn out useful citizens, educated to perform their role in a democratic nation.

Whether the school system has ever succeeded in its great and complex task is a question for historians; some say that American schools have always been middle-class institutions which have never at any time truly offset the disadvantages of poverty, foreign birth, or minority status. Whatever the historical verdict, teachers and philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists have turned critical attention on present-day American schools and find them lacking in many areas.

President Nixon said in his 1970 White House Message on Education Reform that

> American education is in urgent need of reform. . . . The decade of the 1970's calls for thoughtful redirection to improve our ability to make up for the environmental deficiencies among the poor . . . and for the enhancement of learning before and beyond school.

In the case of slum schools, a failure to make up the environmental deficiencies the President mentions has been highly visible. Falling reading scores of inner-city children, high dropout rates, increasing discipline problems, and an ever-widening educational gap between slum children and children of the middle classes surely suggest that the schools are not succeeding as equalizers of an unequal society. On the contrary, most observers agree that slum schools have failed signally to offset the disadvantages of

poverty or racial discrimination; many studies of schools and students show that student achievement is more closely correlated with the student's home background than with his school experience. President Nixon observed in his White House Message on Education Reform that "we . . . know that the social and economic environment which surrounds a child at home and outside of school probably has more effect on what he learns than the quality of the school he now attends."

James Coleman, who headed the 1966 U.S. Office of Education study entitled ***Equality of Educational Opportunity,*** the largest Federal study of education ever undertaken in this country, concluded that "schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school."

Charles Silberman, who conducted the recent Carnegie Corporation survey of the American school system said, in his report, ***Crisis in the Classroom*** (1964, p. 62):

> One of the purposes of schooling—not the only purpose, but a critical one nevertheless—is to teach the intellectual skills and academic knowledge that students need if they are to be able to earn a decent living and to participate in the social and political life of the community. This the slum schools are failing to do.

Slum schools, in other words, perpetuate the differences they are meant to erase.

But Silberman, like other critics of the schools, goes on to point out that slum school failure is only more apparent, not more real, than the failure of schools generally. "Our preoccupation with the urban crisis must not be permitted to blind us to the important, if less urgent, defects of public schools everywhere. In good measure, the defects and failures of the slum schools are but an exaggerated version of what's wrong with ALL schools." The White House Conference on Children (1970, p. 5–3) came to much the same conclusion:

> Increasingly we have come to understand that suburban schools and . . . rural schools do not assure the diet or provide the vitality our children deserve. Even the middle-class school around the corner reveals ragged edges surrounding a soft center. The failures of our schools are apparent in dropout rates, in barely minimal learning on the part of many who do remain in school, and in growing alienation among the young of all colors and classes.

The problems and the defects of schools are similar, whatever their constituency, according to Silberman, and the responses to the problems should be similar, too. "The remedy for the defects of slum schools is the remedy for the defects of all schools: namely, to transform them into free, open, humane, and joyous institutions." Educators themselves and their professional asso-

ciations readily agree with these criticisms and the suggested reforms. As the National Education Association, spokesman for more than one million classroom teachers, noted in its recent staff report, ***Schools for the 70's,*** "The major goal for educational reform in the coming decade" is to transform schools into "humane institutions."

That middle-class schools fail in the eyes of their own students is apparent in the attitudes of most students toward school. Dr. Daniel Offer's study of normal adolescent boys, published as ***The Psychological World of the Teen-Ager*** (1969) found that students whose relations with their parents were harmonious, who enjoyed healthy self-esteem, and whose lives generally were proceeding smoothly, "ranked school and studying as their most important area of conflict." The school atmosphere, according to Dr. Offer, a psychiatrist, is "a tense one for both the student and the teacher. . . . The student often feel constricted in the school environment and cannot wait until they are finished (daily or in the long run)." Dr. Offer also points out that most of these students adapted well to school, in spite of the problems; they learned to live with the tensions and the rigidities of rules and scheduling. But his description of student attitudes makes it clear that even normal and untroubled middle-class youngsters in "good" and privileged schools scarcely regard schools as free, open, and humane.

Responsible criticism of so complex an entity as the American public school system is not easily summarized in a few pages. The effort here must be simply to describe how the schools look from the student's vantage point, to indicate something of the range and the direction of thoughtful criticism, and to point to some of the recurring themes of reform.

On the ordinary day-in, day-out level—the level on which children encounter school—schools, critics say, have allowed administrative details, disciplinary control, and a host of other matters to take precedence over learning. Almost no one believes that this is a matter of intent on the part of school administration and faculty. But any teacher can testify to how much time in a classroom is spent on a hundred things that have nothing to do with teaching or learning. Herbert Kohl, teacher and author of ***36 Children*** (1967) and ***The Open Classroom*** (1969) writes:

> Time in most schools is considered a precious quantity, and teachers are upset when they feel time is wasted. But the conventional notion of "wasted time" is deceptive. In fact, time is wasted in school by all sorts of things—taking attendance, lining up, collecting papers, rehearsing rules and routines. It is also often wasted by going through material that bores everyone and is attended to only by pupils who are the most dependent on the teacher (p. 52).
>
> I was supposed to teach the fifth-grade curriculum no matter who my students were or what they cared about. I was also supposed to take attendance; sign circulars; contribute to a fund for purchasing birthday presents for colleagues . . ., take my turn at yard duty, hall duty, and lunchroom duty. The demands were as frequent as they were senseless (p. 12).

And a teacher in East Harlem is quoted in ***The Schoolchildren*** (Green and Ryan 1965, p. 8):

> The health cards have eaten up time for three weeks. Eyes have to be tested, each child weighed (send out and borrow the scale if you can get it), ears checked (takes half a morning; we sit out in the hall, a teacher with audiometer comes in). This with extra mimeo'd form from the school principal, on "Daily Health and Appearance Check" for teacher to fill out (how many without handkerchiefs, how many ears are dirty, etc.).

But these duties, tedious and time-wasting as they are, are minor compared to the time spent on control of students. Pressure for control of students in school begins in the conviction that a certain degree of order is necessary to learning. However, a rising tide of criticism maintains that control has become an end in itself in nearly all schools, to the great detriment of both teaching and learning. Commentaries from teachers, students, and outside critics support the charge. Says Herbert Kohl (1969, p. 13):

> The entire staff of the school was obsessed by "control," and beneath the rhetoric of faculty meetings was the clear implication that students were a reckless, unpredictable, immoral and dangerous enemy.

Edgar Friedenberg (1965a) observes: "School personnel become specialists in . . . the *control* of large groups of students even at catastrophic expense to their opportunity to learn. These controls are not exercised primarily to facilitate instruction and, particularly, they are in no way limited to matters bearing on instruction." And Charles Silberman has said, "The most important characteristic schools share in common is preoccupation with order and control," a statement he details (1970, p. 132) as follows:

> Students in most schools cannot leave the classroom (or the library or the study hall) without permission, even to get a drink of water or to go to the toilet, and the length of time they can spend there is rigidly prescribed. In high schools and junior high schools, the corridors are usually guarded by teachers and students on patrol duty, whose principal function is to check the credentials of any student walking through. In the typical high school, no student may walk down a corridor without a form, signed by a teacher, telling where he is coming from, where he is going, and the time, to the minute, during which the pass is valid. In many schools, the toilets are kept locked except during class breaks, so that a student not only must obtain a pass but must find the custodian and persuade him to unlock the needed facility. Indeed, the American high school's "most memorable arrangements," as Edgar Z. Friedenberg puts it, "are its corridor passes and its johns; they dominate social interaction."

One high school student remarked ironically, "I am sure that the Pearly Gates are not locked so securely as the bathroom doors in my school."

There are generally reasons somewhere behind the rules, but all too often the effort to enforce the regulations seems well out of proportion to the good accomplished. The following examples are from Silberman's

book (1970) they could be duplicated in almost any school, on almost any normal school day.

> ITEM: The principal of the elementary school serving the city's wealthiest neighborhood insists that all students carry their books in their left hand when going from room to room. Asked why, the principal looks surprised, and after some hesitation and fumbling, explains that the children need to have their right hands free to hold on to the banisters to avoid falling when going up or down stairs. And besides, he adds, if children were permitted to carry books in their right hand, they might bang them against, and thus damage, the steel coat lockers that line some of the halls. (The students are also required to walk only on the right side of the corridors and stairs.) (p. 131)
>
> ITEM: A visitor asks a junior high school principal why his school's twelve-, thirteen-, and fourteen-year-old students are required to "line up" in each classroom before being permitted to leave for the next class. "Didn't you notice how narrow our halls are?" he replies. "No, I did not," the visitor answers. "But I did notice that the youngsters abandon the single lines as soon as they leave the classroom." The principal thinks for a minute, then announces his solution: "I guess we'll have to get more marshalls to patrol the halls" (p. 131).
>
> ITEM: A new suburban elementary school is being hailed in architectural circles for its "open design." The building has no corridors; the sixteen classrooms open instead onto "project areas" equipped with work tables, sinks, easels, and the like. What the architects do not know, however, is that in most classrooms the project areas go unused. As the principal explains, "If some children are in the project area while others are in the regular classroom, the teacher can't watch every child, and some of them might start talking" (p. 128).

Such excessive concern with order and control is not only time-wasting, it is the starting point for bitter antischool feelings by many students. It convinces many students that they are disliked and distrusted (White House Conference on Children 1970, p. 8–6):

> School is perceived by many youngsters as an unfair battle where their survival mechanisms are taken from them and where their natural alliances with other students are viewed with suspicion. Stripping a child's individuality from him in the name of "we don't have time for that" (which the child hears as "you don't have time for *me*") will either cripple the child psychologically or make him a determined enemy.

The struggle to control students down to the smallest details of their lives in school can turn students and administrators into implacable foes. One high school sudent expressed his feeling on this matter as follows (Hill 1969, p. 40):

> Education has been reduced to a cankerous and frigid war;

> a war that has inflicted more casualties than all the bullets and arrows ever shot; the Teacher-Student war. Somewhere along the line (what goes on in teacher's colleges anyway?), someone got the notion that the school is a battleground where the present generation-in-power was to stand ground and meet the ranks of the onrushing rebellious newer generation, whose destiny it was to eventually take power and defend its position against the newer generation, whose destiny it was to take over . . . and on and on."

Another student views his school as a prison (Birmingham 1970, p. 76):

> Ever notice how much our high school (or any other high school) is like a prison? Why you can't even go to the lavatory without first begging for permission and assuring the teacher that it is "necessary." Just as in a prison, you are forced to take abuse from anyone "in authority" without complaint, knowing that to do so would only invite punishment. You are expected to be docile and obedient cattle who unquestioningly act, look, and think according to the school's wishes. In short, the school allows you all the personal freedoms that any well-run prison would.

These are the comments of high school students old enough to articulate their resentment, but even little children tell the story, if differently (LeShan 1967, p. 252):

> A "Candid Camera" crew asked a group of first-grade children what they had learned in the first few months of going to school. One child said, "I learned to hold up my hand," another said, "To control yourself," another, "How to be quiet," and another, "My teacher yells even louder than my mother."

Criticis object not because the restrictions are severe, or the penalties for violations cruel, but because education gets pushed aside in favor of petty rules and, worse, becomes entangled and identified with pettiness. As Edgar Friedenberg (1965*a*, p. 46) points out,

> American high schools are not concentration camps and I am not complaining about their severity but about what they teach their students about the proper relationship of the individual to society. . . .

The NEA Report (1971, pp. 70–71) stressed the incompatibility between humane education and overcontrol:

> Humane education . . . insists that learning is one of the most exciting and deeply fulfilling human activities, and that something has gone haywire when the whole process has to be surrounded by a Gestapo-like environment that stresses order, discipline, neatness, and SILENCE WHEN YOU ARE NOT RECITING, and hooks the whole business up to a system of emotional punishment.

Undoubtedly, the most familiar criticism of schools is that of "irrelevance"; the word has become a cliche. Irrelevance, of course, can mean many things to many people. Students, when they accuse schools of irrelevance, usually think they are talking about *what* the school teaches. And it is true that schools are occasionally guilty of startling irrelevancies in the subject matter taught. Silberman's "item" (1970, pp. 172, 173) illustrates this point:

> ITEM: The students in a sixth-grade English class in a school on a Chippewa Indian reservation are all busily at work, writing a composition for Thanksgiving. The subject of the composition is written on the blackboard for the students(and the visitor) to see. The subject: "Why We Are Happy the Pilgrims Came."

But the judgment of the relevance or irrelevance of any given subject matter is a highly flexible and subjective one. To the student interested in science, English may be "irrelevant," and to the youngster wrapped up in music, science may be "irrelevant." To the student who is hostile or bored by school generally, anything the school wants to teach him is "irrelevant." What is irrelevant to a student is, very simply, knowledge he has no interest in, nor a feeling of responsibility for acquiring. Clearly this can be anything at all that the school teaches.

But if the charge as it comes from youngsters seems exasperatingly vague and ill-formed, it is nevertheless one that many adult observers of schools have defined rather differently—and endorsed. Irrelevance, according to many critics, grows less often out of badly chosen subject matter than out of the school's view of knowledge as something that can be imparted to students by teachers. One critic calls the attitude the "mug-jug" theory of education. According to this approach, the teacher is the jug who tips over and pours knowledge into the empty mug, the student.

But students, as much research into the learning process has shown, are unlikely to learn unless they are somehow involved in the process of learning; they seldom learn much when they are treated simply as passive receptors. Cast in a passive role, students take little responsibility for their own education. As Silberman (1970, pp. 135–136) points out, such lack of involvement tends to undermine the drive to think for themselves.

> Schools discourage students from developing the capacity to learn by and for themselves; they make it impossible for a youngster to take responsibility for his own education, for they are structured in such a way as to make students totally dependent upon the teachers. Whatever rhetoric they may subscribe to, most schools in practice define education as something teachers do to or for students, not something students do to and for themselves, with a teacher's assistance. . . . The result is to destroy students' curiosity along with their ability —more serious, their desire—to think or act for themselves.

The "mug-jug" theory of education has another serious drawback: In a time when all of society is changing at an unprecedented rate, it is difficult

to know what knowledge should be poured from jug to mug. It is safe to assume that most knowledge of a factual sort will be out of date by the time a student leaves school. This being so, the school's job becomes less that of imparting knowledge, than of teaching children *how to learn*, so that they will be able to learn whatever the future requires them to learn. Again, Silberman (1970, pp. 113–114) says:

> For children who may still be in the labor force in the year 2030, nothing could be more wildly impractical than an education designed to prepare them for specific vocations or professions or to facilitate their adjustment to the world as it is. To be "practical," an education should prepare them for work that does not yet exist and whose nature cannot even be imagined. This can only be done by teaching them how to learn, by giving them the kind of intellectual discipline that will enable them to apply man's accumulated wisdom to new problems as they arise—the kind of wisdom that will enable them to RECOGNIZE new problems as they arise.

As Silberman points out here, this kind of learning has nothing to do with the accumulation of facts and everything to do with the development of an attitude toward problem-solving.

Yet one of the most thoughtful of the contemporary commentators on the schools insists that just here is the gravest failure in present-day schooling; most schools are *not* successfully teaching children how to learn, he believes. John Holt, elementary school teacher and gentle but relentless critic of contemporary schools, has written ***How Children Fail*** (1964), ***How Children Learn*** (1967), ***The Underachieving School*** (1969), and most recently, ***What Do I Do Monday?*** (1970). In all of these books, it is Holt's central contention that much of what goes on in schools not only does not promote but actually may prevent learning. Children's curiosity, and ultimately, even their capacity to learn, may be killed, Holt believes, first, if the school atmosphere is one of fear. He says (1964, pp. 91, 208):

> There are very few children who do not feel, during most of time they are in school, an amount of fear, anxiety, and tension that most adults would find intolerable. It is no coincidence at all that in many of their worst nightmares adults find themselves back in school.
>
> We adults destroy most of the intellectual and creative capacity of children by the things we do to them or make them do. We destroy this capacity above all by making them afraid, afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being *wrong*. Thus we make them afraid to gamble, afraid to experiment, afraid to try the difficult and the unknown.

Second, the taste for learning is diluted by what Holt calls the "answer-centeredness" of most school teaching. Instead of examining a problem to find the answer, children "see a problem as a kind of announcement that, far off in some mysterious Answerland, there is an answer, which they are

supposed to go out and find." Since the answer, one way or another, is usually given by the teacher, children do not gain confidence in their own ability to solve problems and to think for themselves.

In short, Holt says (1964, p. 190):

> Our "tell-'em-and-test-'em" way of teaching leaves most students increasingly confused, aware that their academic success rests on shaky foundations, and convinced that school is mainly a place where you follow meaningless procedures to get meaningless answers to meaningless questions.

The National Education Association concurs (1971, p. 52):

> The curriculum *must* move away from an emphasis on the retention of facts to an emphasis on the processes of inquiry, comparison, interpretation, and synthesis. A student in whom the desire or the need to know has been developed can learn to go after the information he needs; a student to whom knowledge has been presented as a grab bag of names, numbers, and dates will have little trouble forgetting all of them as soon as the final exam is over.

Obviously, any judgment of schools must be based on their effects upon students. Most children do adjust to school, one way or another; the question is whether their adjustment is desirable or not. As Holt has shown, children adjust to the fear of failure by developing strategies that will help them avoid the public disgrace and discomfort of failure, even if the strategies prevent learning.

"Strategies" include the development of very sensitive mechanisms for detecting the teacher's reactions, so that students can sense in what direction the "right answer" lies; the patience to wait while the teacher gives more and more clues to the answer he wants; the willingness to be thought stupid rather than risk the shame of trying and failing. Holt elaborates (1964, pp. 73–74):

> A year ago I was wondering how a child's fears might influence his strategies. . . . The strategies of most of these kids have been consistently self-centered, self-protective, aimed above all else at avoiding trouble, embarrassment, punishment, disapproval, or loss of status. This is particularly true of the ones who have had a tough time in school. When they get a problem, I can read their thoughts on their faces, I can almost hear them, "Am I going to get this right? Probably not; what'll happen to me when I get it wrong? Will the teacher get mad? Will the other kids laugh at me? Will my mother and father hear about it? Will they keep me back this year? Why am I so dumb? And so on.

Some students adjust by developing a philosophical detachment which allows them to regard the whole school system as a kind of vast machine operating without regard to human beings. Silberman (1970, p. 155) records how one high school student put it:

> The main thing is not to take it personal, to understand that it's just a system and it treats you the same way it treats everybody else, like an engine or a machine or something mechanical. Our names get fed into it— we get fed into it— when we're five years old, and if we catch on and watch our step, it spits us out when we're 17 or 18. . . .

Such an attitude may be useful in reducing frustration and resentment for the student, but there is surely reason to question whether it represents the ideal relationship between student and education.

Most common of all adjustments to the pressures or the boredom children find in school is the "removal-of-mind" teachers know so well as daydreaming. Every teacher is familiar with the child who is physically present in the classroom, but whose mind is well out of reach. Theresa Hill (1969, p. 27) expresses the idea poetically like this:

> My mind flies out the window to the grey blue sky
> out there I find a seagull
> sitting on a soft cloud—
>
> "Hand in your papers" I hear the ocean cry
> the sky turns brown
> the cloud turns to air
> and I fall down
> into this hard wooden chair.

A White House Conference Forum (1970, p. 5–3) summed up the present school environment this way:

> At the root of the problem is an implicit denial of diversity. The schools have become great sorting machines, labeling and certifying those who presumably will be winners and losers as adults. The winners are disproportionately white and affluent; the losers, too often, poor, and brown or black or red.
>
> But many of the winners are losers, too. For they are shaped, directed, and judged according to a narrow conception of what is proper. This process begins very early . . . This process of channeling energy and talent is refined and perfected in the schools through a network of expectations, rules, grades, required subjects, and rewards for what is wanted and the subtle extinction of the great range of talents and achievements which are not wanted.

Recommendations on how to improve the schools range from large-scale changes to small, from basic structural revision of the entire system to changes in the classroom attitudes of teachers toward students. The sharpest departure from traditional assumptions is the recommendation to end compulsory school attendance laws. Some would have the public schools continue to operate, but without compulsory attendance. Freed of the necessity to compel attendance, schools could turn their attention to education. John Holt has argued that "jailing" and educating are contradictory functions: "The schools can be in the jail business or in the education business, but not in both."

Some radically new approaches to schooling are past the recommenda-

tion stage and into operation. Philadelphia's Parkway Program—the "school without walls"—is designed to establish a "learning community" in which all members of the school learn and help decide what needs to be learned.

Operating from a large, old, downtown office building, the students and teachers hold "class" anywhere in the city. Students participate in two main activities: tutorial groups and "institutional offerings." The tutorial groups of 15 students and a university intern counsel and evaluate student activities, and also design activities to help each student achieve proficiency in language and mathematics. The "institutional offering" is a course or activity conducted by a local business or cultural or other organization and gives students an opportunity for firsthand experience and study, rather than short-term, passive observation.

Another alternative to the public school system is the so-called "street academy" approach, designed to attract drop-outs or push-outs. One such is a three-tiered, privately funded and controlled school system in New York City which is geared to meet both the immediate and the long-range needs of students, whether college-bound or not. Thirteen "street academies" are the starting points. Small groups of students meet with several teachers and streetworkers in storefront centers, where they study everything from Eldridge Cleaver to Plato.

Harlem Prep, on the third tier, offers a college preparatory program. The pace and curriculum are set by the teachers and students according to specific needs and interests of the individuals. Although the teachers meet their students on the student's level, they are not content to let them stay there. They adapt curricula and teaching methods to student interests and learning styles as a means of getting them hooked on learning and out of the cycle of failure and apathy that afflicts so many ghetto students.

Another departure from traditional practice is the educational voucher system—now undergoing feasibility studies in California, Indiana, and Washington, with financial support from the Office of Economic Opportunity. Under this arrangement, parents would be given for each school-age child an educational voucher approximately equal in value to the amount spent by the local school system on the education of one child. Thus, parents can remove their children from schools which are patently failing to teach them and seek out more effective institutions.

The exploration of change in the form of noncomplusory attendance, street schools, schools without walls, and with educational vouchers is part of a search for more effective approaches to public education. Looking ahead into the 21st century, the 1970 White House Conference on Children Forum on Learning (p. 5-5) predicted an ever-increasing diversity of educational methods and approaches:

> Compulsory education—or compulsory attendance, as it might better be called—will be a thing of the past. School as we know it, will have been replaced by a diffuse learning environment involving homes, parks, public buildings, museums, business offices, guidance centers. . . . There will be successors to our present schools—places designed for people to gather for purposes of learning things together.

Like the White House conferees, most reformers anticipate greater variety and experimentation in the education of the future, and welcome both. But concerned critics of schools are unwilling just to wait for long-range solutions. Accepting the school attendance laws and the school plant pretty much as they are, they search for ways in which education can be transformed within the existing arrangements. Structures, both administrative and physical, are important, and can add to or detract from education in important ways, but the real heart of the matter lies in the relationship between the student and teacher. It is through this relationship, reformers believe, that education can most readily be changed.

What is most urgently needed to transform education on a day-to-day level is a willingness, by teachers especially, to question many traditional assumptions about the process of learning and to make what may be fundamental changes in their attitudes toward children as students. Robert Coles has said, "Perhaps we have been asking the wrong questions. Instead of asking, 'What is the best method of teaching?' we should be asking, 'How does the child best learn?'" And John Holt (1964, p. 162) adds:

> A child learns, at any moment, not by using the procedure that seems best to us, but the one that seems best to HIM; by fitting into his structure of ideas and relationships, his mental model of reality, not the piece we think comes next, but the one he thinks comes next.
>
> This is hard for teachers to learn. . . . The more aware we are of the structural nature of our own ideas, the more we are tempted to try to transplant this structure whole into the minds of children. But it cannot be done. They must do this structuring and building for themselves.

This kind of thinking challenges the notion that any one teaching method can succeed with all children and, indeed, is representative of a strong and growing demand for greater flexibility and individuality in education. President Nixon's Message of Education Reform (1970) asks for this kind of change:

> Teachers and taxpayers alike must not accept the ***status quo*** in the process of teaching. We must make the schooling fit the student. We must improve education in those areas of life outside the school where people learn so much or so little. We must discover how to begin educating the young mind when it really begins to learn.

Very closely allied with this call for greater individualism in schools are the pleas for teachers to examine their attitudes toward children they teach. In a subtle but very real way, a teacher's estimate, conscious or unconscious, of a student's abilities is a very powerful force in shaping those abilities. A number of psychological studies have shown that children—like most people—respond to what is expected of them. If a child perceives that his teacher expects little of him, his own estimate of his competence may drop. This means that the child whose teacher is convinced that he *cannot* learn, very frequently does not learn. Even if the teacher believes that he is concealing

his attitude, the child nearly always gets the message. Charles Silberman's remarks on this relationship (1970, p. 83) are apt:

> What is it in the schools that leads to failure? Professor Robert K. Merton of Columbia University, one of the most distinguished American sociologists, suggested the answer in 1948, in his theory of the "self-fulfilling prophecy." Stated as simply as possible, the theory holds that in many, if not most, situations, people tend to do what is expected of them— so much so, in fact, that even a false expectation may evoke the behavior that makes it seem true. . . .
>
> Thus, a teacher's expectations can and does quite literally affect a student's performance. The teacher who assumes that her students cannot learn is likely to discover that she has a class of children who are indeed unable to learn; yet another teacher, working with the same class but without the same expectation, may discover that she has a class of interested learners. The same obtains with respect to behavior: the teacher who assumes that her students will be disruptive is likely to have a disruptive class on her hands.

On the other hand, the child whose teachers expect good things of him very often achieves well, no matter what his initial disadvantages. The positive self-fulfilling prophecy is as real as the negative. Silberman continues (1970, p. 98):

> In every successful program . . . a major reason for success is the fact that project directors and teachers expect their students to succeed, and that they hold themselves—not only their students—accountable if the latter should fail. "He believes so much in you he gives you confidence in yourself," a black University of Oregon freshman, who a year earlier had been living off the streets, says of Professor Arthur Pearl, director of the University's Upward Bound program, which prepared him for the university. "Pearl builds something in you—strength," another student explains. "He expects you to do it right, but he's honest; he doesn't con you or mollycoddle you if you do it wrong."

Faith does seem to move children, if not mountains.

Because what a teacher believes about a child's abilities has such power to shape a child's performance in school, teachers are best advised, John Holt (1970, p. 75) believes, to suspend their judgments of children.

> We are all too likely to see, and only to see, what we look for, or what we expect to see. If teachers feel they have to read what other teachers have said about the children in their class, they should wait until they have had at least a couple of months to get to know them and to make their own impressions. Every child should have every year—better, every day—a chance to make a fresh start.

And Herbert Kohl (1969, p. 21) is specific:

> What does it mean to suspend expectations when one is told

80

> that the class one will be teaching is slow, or bright, or ordinary? . . . It means . . . preparing diverse materials and subjects and discovering from the students as the year unfolds what is relevant to them and what isn't.
>
> Particularly it means not reading IQ scores or achievement scores, not discovering who may be a source of trouble and who a solace or even a joy. It means giving your pupils a fresh chance to develop in new ways in your classroom, freed from the roles they may have adopted during their previous school careers. It means allowing children to become who they care to become, and freeing the teacher from the standards by which new pupils had been measured in the past.

The question of how children best learn is pervasive in the work and observations of such reforming teachers as John Holt, Herbert Kohl, and James Herndon (author of ***The Way It Spozed to Be***, published in 1965). These teachers have been willing to set aside preconceived notions about children, teaching methods, classroom rules, and so on, and to be patient enough and observant enough to discover for themselves something about how children learn—or fail to learn. It was sensitive observation, not theory, that showed Holt that children were failing to learn even in "good" private schools, no matter what their achievement test scores showed. It was patience and the willingness to suspend judgment that showed Herndon (1965, p. 167) how apparent disorder could have purpose and point in a classroom:

> There they were, about fifteen or so kids, all in a cluster, standing, shouting at each other, Verna in the middle shouting at all of them—a hundred demands, questions, orders, all at once. You couldn't make it out at all. Probably there were a hundred shouted irrelevancies, threats and insults too. But the fact is this outcry was orderly in intent and in effect, for in about four or five minutes it was all over, readers were sitting down, they had books, the audience was getting ready to listen. I doubt very much if 9D could have been organized to read a play in five minutes, even by an experienced teacher with a machine gun.

It was the willingness to observe for himself that led Herbert Kohl (1965, p. 31) away from the conventional generalizations about "disadvantaged" children and classroom discipline, and into a relationship with his students that showed him their uniqueness and their potential:

> Fear is only overcome through risk and experimentation. As I became familiar with the children individually and less dependent on the protection of the role of teacher. . . . The children did not want to be defiant, insulting, idle; nor were they any less afraid of chaos than I was. They wanted more than anything to feel they were facing it with me and not against me. These discoveries were my greatest strength when I began to explore new things to teach the children. They were as impatient to learn something exciting as I was to find something that would excite them.

Learning how children learn assumes a respect for children; their ideas, their personalities, their special strengths and weaknesses; above all, their individuality. Respect, as Holt has said, "means treating [children] as though their ideas made some difference," and he goes on to point out how vital this respect is to the process of learning (1969, p. 103):

> When we treat people this way, whatever their age, color or background, we find that communications barriers disappear and that learning takes place. This is, of course, what ought to be happening everywhere in our schools—at Yale as much as in Harlem—and so seldom happens anywhere.

And a respect for the individuality of children may also mean a willingness to put up with some conflict in a classroom, as Herbert Kohl observed (1967, p. 31):

> I have never solved the "discipline problem," but I no longer believe it needs solution. Children will disagree with each other and with the teacher; they will be irrational at times, and the teacher will be, too. An atmosphere must exist in the classroom where conflict, disagreement, and irrationality are accepted temporary occurrences. No child, because he defies, should thereby have to become "a defiant child," or because he refuses to work, "a lazy child." Such labeling makes the classroom a harsh, unforgiving place, a world not fit for children or adults.

As the National Education Association's report, ***Schools for the 70's and Beyond*** (1971), has put it, "A school that draws its energy from humanistic values is one that celebrates personal differences. . . ."

Changing the schools in any important and permanent way is an enormous task. The teacher who attempts new things in his classroom may be resented for his implied criticism of the way things have been done. If trying something new means giving students greater freedom, as it usually does, and if greater freedom means more noise and less order in the classroom, as it usually does, the reforming teacher will almost certainly run headlong into the school's strong preference for quiet and order, and may be judged as an unsuccessful teacher who has "lost control" over his class.

Nor can an innovating teacher always count on the support of parents. Some parents, of course, who believe that schools can do more than they are presently doing, seek out innovative schools and teachers. Others can be brought to support the teacher who is clearly successful in his teaching, no matter how unfamiliar his methods. But if a Louis Harris poll, taken in 1969, of thousands of students, parents, and teachers, is a fair indication, students and teachers come out well ahead of parents in their readiness to support real changes within the schools. As reported by Silberman (1970, pp. 145–146):

> Nearly two-thirds of the high school students' parents surveyed in early 1969 for *Life* by Louis Harris, for example, believe that "maintaining discipline is more important than student self-inquiry"; the comparable figure among teachers

> is only 27 percent. The United States, in short, has the kinds of schools its citizens have thus far demanded. The role of taskmaster is thrust upon the teachers, some of whom accept it willingly, some reluctantly; all are affected by it.

Nevertheless, most parents today are deeply interested in the education of their children because they recognize its central role in their children's lives. However the judgment of the success or failure of American schools in the past is rendered, the fact is that then—*it mattered less.* As Paul Goodman has repeatedly pointed out in his discussions of past and present education, only a very small percent of all Americans were high school graduates in 1900. Fewer still went on to college and graduate school. Many youngsters grew up and learned a trade or profession with no more than 8 or 10 years of formal schooling, or even less. Andrew Carnegie did not attend Harvard Business School; Thomas Edison had no Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering. In other words, there were in the near past *many* paths into the adult world of work and achievement.

Today, however, the alternatives to formal education have narrowed drastically; academic achievement and school credentials command most of the roads to economic and social well-being. *Now,* the success or failure of a child's encounter with school may well determine his success or failure for the rest of his life.

It should be a matter of concern to all adults that so many youngsters find these years of schooling bleak and constraining, like the high school girl—quoted in Sheila Egoff, et al. (1969, p. 403)—who wrote to the ***New York Times:***

> I'm wasting these years of preparation. I'm not learning what I want to learn. . . . I don't care about the feudal system. I want to know about life. I want to think and read. . . .
>
> Every day I come in well prepared. Yet I dread every class; my stomach tightens and I sit tense. . . . I wonder what I'm doing here. I feel phony. . . . You wonder about juvenile delinquents. If I ever become one, I'll tell you why it will be. I feel cramped. I feel like I'm locked in a coffin and can't move or breathe. There's no air or light. All I see is blackness and I've got to burst. Sometimes I feel maybe something will come along. Something has to or I'm not worth anything. My life is worth nothing. It's enclosed in a few buildings. . . . It goes no further.

Chapter V

BRINGING THE WORLDS TOGETHER

"Some teachers are great . . . They put bandages on my hurts—on my heart, on my mind, on my spirit. Those teachers cared about me, and let me know it. They gave me wings."

—Thoughts of a drop-out,
"Today's Education,"
February, 1970, p. 15.

There is an ancient Chinese curse which says, "May you live in interesting times." Americans of the 1970's surely live in an interesting time. If few would regard it as a curse, most would agree that life in such a time is something less than restful. The challenge of rapid and chronic social change, the demands of a highly organized technological society, the erosion of stable and close personal relations—all these characteristic features of contemporary society without doubt complicate the lives of all Americans, but especially those of growing children. The final report of the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children (1970, p. 21) sketched out the general picture of children in today's society:

> All of our children face the many pressures of our changing, impersonal and highly technological society. Massive institutions threaten the individual's sense of unique significance. The divisive factors of racism and social class create a growing sense of polarization and separatism. Despair, apathy, and violence are becoming characteristic of the American scene. These problems are felt most acutely in the idealistic stage of adolescence. Today's adolescents face increasing achievement pressures for educational accomplishments; the imperatives and difficulties of "getting into college" and getting a job; the shifts in sex behavior and values; and the stresses of the draft.
>
> Today's mental health crisis is reflected in the high rates of delinquency, nonlearning, and mental illness. Our inadequate statistics show that 10 to 12 percent of our children and youth

> have psychological problems. Unknown numbers are falling far short of their developmental potential. In addition, there are the all too common problems of teen-age illegitimacy, venereal disease, drug use, youth unemployment, and widespread alienation from society.

Growing up in the context of such an awesome array of problems is not easy. For children do not have already within them the secure values and self-definition which can withstand the buffets of constant change and heavy pressure. In fact, it is the central task of growing up to achieve those values and that sense of personal identity which alone can make it possible to meet the demands of living in "interesting times." As Edgar Friedenberg has said (1965, pp. 17, 29):

> Adolescence is not simply a physical process; there is more to it than sexual maturation. It is also—and primarily—a social process, whose fundamental task is clear and stable self-identification. . . . Adolescence is the period during which a young person learns who he is, and what he really feels. It is the time during which he differentiates himself from his culture, though on the culture's terms. It is the age at which, by becoming a person in his own right, he becomes capable of deeply felt relationships to other individuals perceived clearly as such.

But the search for self-identification, based as it must be on the values and images presented by society to the young, is difficult and confusing in a time when change is the only constant. The final report of the White House Conference on Children (1970, p. 6–2) states:

> Today's child is faced with an ever increasing need to establish an identity that is concerned, responsible, and responsive to the ever changing demands of an unbelievably complex social structure, to become an individual who can communicate under all conditions, who can respond to any stimulus and contribute to all levels of societal needs. But today's solutions may well be tomorrow's problems—the salvation of our society depends upon our children's becoming creative problem-solvers.

It is from the winds of change that the children of this era must fashion such security as they can; in a world of shifting values and an uncertain future, they must find a place to stand.

To do this alone is a formidable task. Yet any close examination of the difficulties of the young in contemporary America uncovers again and again one theme: their sense of isolation from adult society. Paul Goodman has said that "children are spiritually abandoned in our society. They are insulated by not being taken seriously." Urie Bronfenbrenner, Cornell psychologist and Chairman of one forum of the 1970 White House Conference on Children, agrees. Bronfenbrenner believes that American society is becoming "a society that is segregated not only by race and class, but also by age."

Bronfenbrenner sees this development as something neither planned

nor wanted. "Rather, it is the byproduct of a variety of social changes, all operating to decrease the prominence and power of the family in the lives of children." In the absence of adult influence, the influence of other children becomes paramount in a child's life, Bronfenbrenner points out. But the child who turns to his peers does so "less by choice than be default. . . . The vacuum left by the withdrawal of parents and adults from the lives of children is filled with an undesired—and possibly undesirable—substitute of an age-segregated peer group."

Bronfenbrenner does not regard this development with optimism. The process of making human beings human cannot be left to children, in his opinion (1971, p. 45). Transmission of the social values of mutual trust, kindness, cooperation, and social responsibility

> cannot take place without the active participation of the older generation. If children have contact only with their own age-mates, there is no possibility for learning culturally established patterns of cooperation and mutual concern.
>
> We are experiencing a breakdown in the process of making human beings human. What is needed is a change in our ways of living that will once again bring adults back into the lives of children and children back into the lives of adults.

Those who feel the "age-segregation" most keenly are, of course, young people themselves. From ghetto to suburb, they feel their isolation and complain of the distance between themselves and the rest of society. The ghetto child who writes (Joseph 1969, p. 36):

> I have felt lonely, forgotten or even left out, set apart from the rest of the world. I never wanted out. If anything I wanted in.

and the suburban teen who says bitterly that "the only person who listens to me is my shrink—and he gets $25.00 an hour" are saying the same thing. They are saying (even if they don't admit it) that they want and need the security of useful adult guidance and that they need to feel that they fit somewhere in the world they inhabit.

Problems of growing up are as wide as the whole society and as narrow as the individual family. The White House Conference on Children (1970, p. 19–1), pointed out that a child's world cannot be separted from the whole of society:

> The problems we create in our environment for our children generally have the same roots as problems of adults; the world of children and the world of adults are the same.

As Paul Goodman has observed, "It is indispensable to have a coherent, fairly simple and viable society to grow up into; otherwise [children] are confused and some are squeezed out."

But this is a long-term goal. Such a broad view of the problems besetting the world of children, though it is persuasive, is also overwhelming to those who are concerned with the here and now. The fact is that the most basic

pressures of contemporary society are relatively hard to ease; the pace of a fast-changing world is not easily slowed, nor can the complexities of a modern technological society be unravelled to restore the simplicity of an earlier time. To accept the idea that a society must be changed in basic ways before the conditions of growing up can be improved is to accept the improbability of improvement *now*, and perhaps too the improbability of effective action by any *one* person ever.

For different reasons, the problem of the pathological family is also intractable. No one can doubt that the gravest misfortune that can happen to a child is to grow up with adults who are brutal, deranged or highly neurotic, but it is very difficult to extract a child from this position unless or until the situation becomes acute. What help he can be given must usually be indirect and in the form of a counterbalancing influence by someone outside the family.

For those who are concerned about the quality of life for children—and this must necessarily include those who are concerned with the problems of drug abuse, for the two are inseparable—the question comes quickly down to practicalities. How can life be improved for those children who are faring badly in society? How can their isolation be ended? What place in the lives of children is most amenable to change?

George Dennison, author of ***The Lives of Children,*** believes that the likeliest place may well be the school, that second center of a child's life. There a child spends a significant portion of his life and there he meets adults who are significant to his emotional and intellectual development. And, most important, school is that part of a child's environment most susceptible to conscious change. Dennison writes (1970, p. 67):

> Life in our country is chaotic and corrosive, and the time of childhood for many millions is difficult and harsh. It will not be an easy matter to bring our berserk technocracy under control, but we *can* control the environment of the schools. It is a relatively small environment and has always been structured by deliberation. If, as parents, we were to take as our concern not the instruction of our children, but the lives of our children, we would find that our schools could be used in a powerfully regenerative way. Against all that is shoddy and violent and treacherous and emotionally impoverished in American life, we might propose conventions which were rational and straightforward, rich both in feeling and thought, and which treated individuals with a respect we do little more at present than proclaim from our public rostrums. We might cease thinking of school as a place, and learn to believe that it is basically relationships: between children and adults, adults and adults, children and other children. The four walls and the principal's office would cease to loom so hugely as the essential ingredients.

Dennison believes that a school can be a counterbalance, a haven, a window opening onto a better world for the children who attend it and whose lives are difficult elsewhere. Dennison's own First Street School was located in New York's East side. His pupils were all from the East side; several were

such problems that the regular public schools had given up and were about to send them on to special schools. In every case but one, the First Street School was able to improve both the learning and the behavior of these problem children. What was probably more significant in the lives of the children, the school let the children see that there are alternatives to the hostility and the violence that they knew in the ghetto streets. As Dennison says, in the First Street School and its teachers, "the children had acquired allies and havens, and this is no small thing in the hostile streets of New York."

It is indeed no small thing. Nat Hentoff's ***Our Children Are Dying*** is an account which makes it clear that a school need not be private and special to be such a haven. Hentoff's book concerns one New York public elementary school and its remarkable principal, Dr. Elliot Shapiro. Shapiro, who at the time of Hentoff's writing (1966, pp. 7, 8), was principal of P.S. 119 in Central Harlem, believes as strongly as Dennison in the concept of school as a haven for ghetto children:

> Many of our children are not in real communication with an adult. So we have to bring adults into their lives, adults they can depend on and feel at ease with. Coming from large families, often with working mothers and no fathers, our children lose their childhood too early. They become self-reliant, in one sense, too soon. When they're seven or eight, they're as self-reliant as a middle-class young adult. But a dependency relationship with an adult is necessary for children. . . . And the school has to be the place where they can be children—a specially created world in which small events are important and in which they can discuss those events with an adult they trust.

What Shapiro is saying here is that school can give to a child what the rest of his life may not always give him, that is, the chance to grow at his own pace, and acceptance by adults who see him as a child, with a child's need for warmth, attention, and direction. It is what Dennison offered the children in the First Street School, and it is essentially what Paul Goodman (1956, 1962) has so often recommended as the ideal for elementary schools.

Schools like these are not *only* havens; certainly they are not hiding places from the world. School, especially a secondary school, can be a place where children explore their own abilities and talents, and discover what there is to do in the world. Schools can and should give a child a realistic glimpse of his choices for the future. In this one role, a school can play an enormously effective part in opening up a child's vision of his future. Especially for children of impoverished backgrounds, the school's function can be decisive. These children tend to have low aspirations; they often accept without question that their lives will simply repeat those of their parents. Children who are poor, and especially children who are poor and discriminated against, tend to underrate their own worth. Often they do not believe in their own abilities; if they have special talents, they seldom know it. For such children, a school can be a transforming experience. Indeed, a single, interested adult within a school may offer a whole new view of the future to a youngster.

Margaret Anderson, teacher and guidance counselor in a Tennessee high school and author of ***The Children of the South,*** has opened many windows for many young people. Her intervention has been especially vital to a number of black youngsters. In her schools, the number of black students is small in comparison with the number of white children, but these few have a special claim on Mrs. Anderson's attention because their need for thoughtful and knowledgeable adult help is so great. Unlike the white, middle-class students, whose parents quite naturally encourage them to think in terms of college and professional careers, the average black child, Mrs. Anderson observes (1967, pp. 161–162), "has low level aspirations." But,

> This does not mean that he does not want to make something of his life—quite the contrary. He would like to improve his condition more than anything else in the world. But his experiences and his environment have been so limited that he cannot picture himself as holding a major position in the community, or in many different situations. . . . He is therefore likely to set his ambitions at a low level, when with preparation and help he might be very capable of performing at a much higher level. . . . These students might be said to have "latent talents," that is, talents and abilities which were really there all the time but because of circumstances were not brought to the forefront. And sometimes,but for an unusual experience or a fine teacher, these talents can be smothered to death.

To prove her point, Mrs. Anderson tells the story of Nathan (p. 162):

> Nathan came to us in the second year of high school. He came about as poorly prepared academically as a boy could be. But Nathan had spirit—that I can say. Perhaps that was his greatest talent. And if "the spirit can make the master," it certainly did for Nathan. He worked hard, barely passing his courses, even failing a few, and giving no indication of having a gifted mind. One day a young, energetic science teacher, who Nathan admired very much, called for projects from his students for the Science Fair. Nathan set himself to the difficult task of recording the voices of tiny fishes—so faint, so far, far away that it took the most delicate instruments to detect them. Even then, there were some who doubted the queer sounds were really the voices of fish. Nathan laughed along with them and proved that they were.
>
> The judges lingered when they came to Nathan's project spread out among hundreds on the long tables in the school library. They awarded Nathan a prize for his endeavor and had his picture taken for the newspaper. He was invited to enter his project in a higher division of the Science Fair. It was as if a great breakthrough had taken place in his life. After that, he never seemed to doubt his course. He talked only of going on to college.
>
> Now we began to see what the judges had seen—and what was really there all the time—that Nathan had a keen, in-

quisitive mind, an analytical creative mind, and a patient way of reasoning things through. These are very good qualities for a man of science—which Nathan is now in the process of becoming.

It is impossible to predict the influence that one humane institution, one compassionate and enterprising person can have on the life of a child. But many adults, looking back many years after the fact, recognize and pay tribute to the influence of such a place or such a person. Dr. Kenneth Clark, psychologist and educator, grew up in Harlem, a child of poverty and a broken home. He found his haven and his hope for the future in the New York Public Library and in one librarian there, Arthur Schomburg. Dr. Clark recalls (1965):

> I met Schomburg when I was about twelve years old, a crucial period in my life. It was at this time that I clearly recognized that I was not ever going to be able to compete with my classmates in athletic skills.
>
> I went to the library not only to escape the athletic competition, but also to escape the streets. There was something about the peace and the calm of the library that shut out the noise and dirt and conflict. The building's cleanliness and serenity brought me peace, a sense of rightness. The librarians smiled at us; they didn't call us names.
>
> On one of my trips to the library, I decided that I was going to go upstairs to the third floor to that forbidden and mysterious area reserved for adults. I fully expected to be turned away unceremoniously. As I climbed the last flight of stairs, I felt the excitement of an interloper. I was prepared for the risk of either a polite or a more direct rejection. When I entered the room, a large man, whom I later came to know as Arthur Schomburg, got up from his desk and came over to me and smiled. He didn't ask me what I wanted. He merely put one arm around my shoulder and assumed that I was interested in the books. We went over to a table and sat down and began to talk. . . . We talked about books. We talked about wonderful things: about the history of human beings, about the contributions of Negroes which were to be found in books. He showed me portraits of Negroes who had contributed something important, men like Ira Aldridge in his role as Othello. I am sure he knew that he was teaching me.
>
> On that first day of meeting Schomberg, I knew I had met a friend. He did not ask me whether I had come from a broken home. He didn't ask me whether my mother was poor. He never told me to improve myself. He merely looked and saw that I was a human being who was probably desperately hungry more for human acceptance than even for the nourishment which could be found in the books. He accepted me as a human being and through his acceptance helped me to share his love of, and his excitement in, the world of books.
>
> I read biographies of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Pushkin. I

> read about the Negro soldiers who served in the Civil War. I was introduced into a wonderful world of people of color. It provided me with a new basis of pride.
>
> The library was my own, a haven and a place of peace. It was there, through Arthur Schomburg, that I first learned about the excitement inherent in the struggle with words and ideas. This is an incalculable contribution to the life of another human being. . . .
>
> I don't know how many other children in Harlem were so influenced by Schomburg. He had no well-publicized program for the youth of the poor. He used himself. Instead of using labels and designations, such as the disadvantaged, the underprivileged, or the poor, he saw and accepted human beings, and thereby was able to make that contact which is essential for genuine communication and understanding.

Another educator, of a new and special kind, has paid tribute to an important adult in her life, in this case, the teacher who "taught her to think." Joan Ganz Cooney (1971), producer of TV's "Sesame Street," says that her high schoo' modern history teacher, Bud Brown, gave her an awareness of what was going on in the world.

> Back at North High in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1943, kids didn't talk much about the issues of the day, and they weren't accustomed to free-wheeling classroom discussions. Bud Brown changed all that for me. He really awakened my conscience. Nobody had ever talked to me before about things like poverty and race. He'd begin by reading a newspaper clipping about anti-Semitism in Germany, or something like that, and ask for comments, start a debate, lead a discussion about it. To me, this kind of dialogue with a teacher was new.
>
> Bud Brown taught me to question assumptions, and I've been questioning them ever since. He always tried to get students to look at things in a new way. To me, that is a true educator.

Sometimes the help a teacher extends to a child is less that of teaching than of caring—perhaps caring when no one else does. ***The Me Nobody Knows*** is a small paperback anthology of the writings of ghetto children, compiled by Stephen M. Joseph. The book includes a poignant series of letters written to his former teacher by a boy in a State training school. Excerpts from his letters (1969, pp. 52–58) tell a story of stark loneliness unrelieved except by Mr. Grady, who was "like a father" to him:

> April 4
>
> I received your letter today and was very happy to hear from you. Just to know someone cared made me feel like a real person. I had given up all man kind, and was going into a world of my own.
>
> I haven't yet to hear from my people. I have received a money order, but no letter. Nothing telling me if everything is all right. Mr. Grady, I'm really hurt! This morning when they said

I had mail, I felt good. Then when I read your deep letter, I felt like crying. I know someone in my family had a couple of seconds to put hello on some paper and send it off. I've been here going on two months now. But getting back to your letter, it was very touching. I don't know what to say. You're the only one who stuck with me. You're like a father to me. Mr. Grady, all the things you have done for me, I don't know how to thank you.

I shouldn't be telling you my personal problems, but you're the only one I can express my feeling to. I hope you don't mind. . . .

April 21

I haven't yet to hear nor see my parents. Why I don't know. I'm sure it's not a money problem, because my parents both work, and my mother gets a little help from the city, which we aren't doing to bad for a family of sixteen kids. My older brothers and sisters work.

Mr. Grady, do you know how I feel? Theres no reason for them to treat me this way. I'm human too. I understand you have kids to take care of and you can't play the part of my real father. Not saying I've gave you up. . . . You're the only one I can really express my feelings to.

I just wrote my mother a six page letter begging her to bring my close. I would have wrote you sooner, but I had to wait until I could get a stamp. . . .

So I'll change the subject for now. I don't like talking about it at times, because it makes me feel real bad.

So I'm very thankful for everything. What would I do without you Mr. Grady? Whom could I write to, when I write or think about you, my mind is put to ease.

So I hope I haven't upset you or put you to thinking of me because I know you have more to do.

So untill the next letter is posted, I'm signing out.

Your second son

May 3

How are you and your family doing? Just fine I hope. As for myself, I'm fine couldn't feel any better, Mr. Grady.

I write to explain my feelings to you once again, but I bring the good feeling only. This letter will be short, because I don't know what to say.

Well I'm expecting my mother up this sat or sun. She called the people up and told them. I did just what you told me to. I wrote everybody in my family and I just knew that I would hear from someone. My sister wrote me and my girl friend came back to me. So I'm the happyest boy or man in the world today. (I think)

These examples—which could be multiplied many times over—are eloquent in what they say about the power of one person to influence profoundly the direction and quality of a child's life. It is no accident that so many such stories center on a teacher as the significant adult for a youngster. Teachers *are* significant in the lives of children; their role, their daily contact, the continuity of their relationship with the children they teach make them at least potentially an influence second only to the family.

Most fundamentally, they are *there*. Kenneth Clark found his way to the public library; many children do not. Often those who most need the kind of acceptance and dignity Clark discovered in the library never enter the door of any public institution—except the school. Too, the relationship between teachers and students has unusual continuity; contact is frequent enough and lasting enough to allow communication to develop.

Without question, the relationship between teacher and student is an important influence on the student. A teacher's opinion of his student can, and very often does, play a very important part in the student's own opinion of himself, and there is no other single factor, recent research indicates, more important in a youngster's social development than his self-image.

Morris Rosenberg's study, ***Society and the Adolescent Self-Image,*** suggests that "an important, but neglected, intervening variable between social characteristics and attitudes or behavior is the self-image. . . ." A competitive environment, Rosenberg observes (1965, pp. 281–282), can be a serious obstacle to the development of a strong and healthy sense of self-esteem in growing youngsters:

> The general point is that whenever a value is set forth which can only be attained by a few, the conditions are ripe for widespread feelings of personal inadequacy. An outstanding example in American society is the fierce competitiveness of the school system. No educational system in the world has so many examinations, or so emphasizes grades, as the American school system. Children are constantly being ranked and evaluated. The superior achievement of one child tends to debase the achievement of another. . . .
>
> As one views modern society, one is forcefully struck by the enormous amount of "failure," i.e., the gap between aspirations and achievements, which exists. It is readily apparent that such failure takes an important psychic and emotional toll.

Failure that damages the adolescent self-image plays a part in the loneliness many adolescents feel. Low self-esteem may contribute to a feeling of isolation, according to Rosenberg (pp. 162–163), and isolation is associated with anxiety, for most youngsters.

> The person who stands alone lacks social support; thus, he is more likely to feel threatened by the powerful sea of forces which surround him. He can never share himself with another completely, and he can never feel the strength and reassurance which comes from such sharing and support. . . .

> Problems which others can work out with friends or relatives must be faced by him alone, and are therefore felt to be inordinately dangerous and anxiety-provoking.

Finally, teachers have an opportunity to extend their special knowledge of the special world of school to youngsters who are in the process of making important decisions about the future. Here a teacher's contribution can be crucial, particularly to a young person whose ideas of the world of work and of his own potential are unclear and uncertain. As Margaret Anderson (1967) has said, "A teacher . . . can fling a thread across a chasm of the mind of a child and build a bridge that will last all eternity."

Thus, of all adults outside of the family, teachers have perhaps the greatest opportunity to offset or prevent the sense of isolation so common among youngsters in the teen years, to bridge the loneliness and counterbalance some of the strains that modern society and a highly competitive school system place on growing young people. And because a young person's decision to use or not use drugs almost certainly grows out of the sum of his attitudes toward himself and the world, teachers have potentially a strong role to play in the whole matter of drug abuse by the young.

It perhaps bears repeating that drug abuse that goes beyond experimentation is seldom completely out of context in the life of a youngster. The young person who is reasonably at peace with himself and his family, who is interested in the world around him and in his own future seldom becomes seriously involved with drugs. It is the lost, the lonely, the alienated and discouraged youngsters who get deeply into the drug scene.

Earlier chapters have tried to present a brief survey of some of the special difficulties of growing up in contemporary America. These difficulties, it is suggested, combine with all the old and familiar problems of growing up in any era to make alienation and isolation a relatively common problem for many of today's youngsters. Dr. Stanley Yolles, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, State University of New York at Stony Brook, and former Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, believes that alienation is a very widespread problem in present-day America. Communication gaps between generations is an old problem, Dr. Yolles noted; however, "the current problem of alienation in the United States is wider, deeper, and more diffuse than at any previous time in our history. It affects the rich and the poor, the college student and the school dropout, the urban and the rural youngster. The number of persons . . . beset by alienation is far greater than that seen in any previous generation." In the opinion of many experts, including Dr. Yolles, the alienation and sense of isolation felt by so many young people is a basic cause of the wave of drug abuse that has swept across the past decade. In his testimony before a Senate subcommittee in 1969, Dr. Yolles said, "If we are ever to solve the problem of drug abuse, it is critical for us to focus on and try to solve the root causes of alienation."

Dr. Robert C. Petersen, Chief of the Center for Studies of Narcotic and Drug Abuse at NIMH, discussed the background of drug use by the young in a paper presented at the Conference on Drug Usage and Drug Subcultures held in 1970:

> Many teenagers have no meaningful role in our society. There is little early need to assume adult roles and, indeed, the society lacks meaningful activity for more than a fraction of our youth. At the same time that they have an unparalleled awareness of the problems of the society and are frequently very perceptive about it, teenagers are denied a meaningful role in shaping it. They are instead encouraged to be part of the "teenage market," to consume without producing. Despite their many material advantages, they are commonly "put down" as human beings and share with the aging an unenviable sense of uselessness. Freed from responsibility, encouraged in a vacuous consumerism, often bored, it is not surprising that the appeal of drugs as a way to find meaning, relieve boredom or simply provide diversion is great.

And Dr. Bertram Brown (1970) Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, has said:

> I believe many of the young people who have copped out—who have opted not to participate in our society—have done so from a sense of frustration. They have felt helpless to bring about change, and this feeling of helplessness has degenerated into apathy and a turning inward with the help of drugs.

Those who view the problem of drug abuse in these terms, who see a close connection between the social and psychological environment of the growing youngster and his impulse to use drugs, agree that the basic solution to the problem lies in providing alternatives to drug abuse. "Many of us," Petersen said in the speech quoted above, "believe that what is basically needed if we are to discourage large numbers of youth from making drug use an important focus of their lives are psychologically tenable alternatives. By this I mean nonchemical ways of 'turning on'—of finding personal meaning in living."

When the phenomenon of drug abuse is looked at this way, it is apparent that a teacher's strongest role in the prevention of drug abuse may well come along before the specific question of drug use arises. The teacher whose psychological support of his students is good and frequent, whose knowledge and perception are put in the service of youngsters as they grope to find themselves in relation to the adult world—such teachers are unquestionably powerful agents in preventing the despair and loneliness that may turn youngsters to drugs.

And when the question of drug use is before a youngster and he must make a decision for or against, the teacher may again be the adult who is in the strongest position to influence that decision. Dr. Sidney Cohen, in ***The Drug Dilemma*** (1969, pp. 120–121), has said:

> The teacher, in addition to making the educative process as interesting, constructive, and alive as possible, can also have a great influence on the decision to take or continue to take drugs. He is often the confidant when parents are lacking or have failed to accept their role. The teacher may be the first to learn of, or notice, aberrant behavior due to drugs. He may

be able to persuade his pupil by presenting factual information.

Those who have devoted significant portions of their professional lives to studying the problem of drug abuse have given a good deal of thought to how schools and teachers can be most effective in dealing with drug abuse among students. Dr. Cohen, like Dr. Petersen and Dr. Brown, believes that on the broadest level, the answer to drug abuse in the young lies in convincing them of genuine alternatives; and he believes that the school and teachers can be instrumental in creating and presenting such alternatives. In a paper read at The International Institute for the Prevention and Treatment of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (1970), Dr. Cohen said:

> The decision to take drugs is not a rational one, rather it is an emotional reaction. As we come to learn more about the many causes of drug overuse: boredom, frustration, lack of goals, inability to enjoy sober existence, poor relationships with family and others, peer group pressures, etc., we must also learn how to eradicate these causes. Children should find out that important and exciting alternatives to drug taking exist. The school experience must be made more meaningful.
>
> At least children should have an opportunity to express feelings, to develop their personal identity, to be helped in the search for meaning and value in life. They should be aided in developing a resilience to endure frustration, and the independence of thought to resist the pressures of their peers. All this can be done by a sensitive teacher in a small group setting. This kind of interchange may help in many areas of adolescent turmoil, not only drug abuse.

That alternatives are the best and most positive form of drug abuse prevention is apparent to teenagers themselves. ***Youth Report No. 2*** (Herzog, et al. 1971, pp. 18–20), an HEW-supported survey of teenagers' attitudes toward drugs and drug abuse, quotes youngsters on positive reasons for not using drugs:

> "The biggest reason I believe is they like life like it is, and not a fantasy life."
>
> "The major thing that keeps a person from turning to or continue using drugs is finding something worthwhile to do in life. Finding something around which he can build his life."
>
> "There are many teenagers who are just as unhappy with our situation today. These people, including myself, have never tried drugs. We haven't felt that it was necessary, because we have been trying to do something about the things which we feel are wrong today. We have marched for peace, campaigned at conventions, negotiated on high school campuses, and hoped for results. When we get low, we stop for awhile and escape to an empty beach, a quiet park, a desert, or the mountains. We try to become lyrical after beating our heads against walls that may never budge."

Making alternatives like these visible and real to young people is, as Dr. Cohen has pointed out, a natural role for a sensitive, committed teacher.

These general concepts about the teacher's part in turning young people away from drugs have been translated into specific suggestions for teachers by Dr. Robert Petersen. He offers the following advice:

1. Keep your perspective.

Drug abuse is a serious problem where it exists, but it should be remembered that the majority of youngsters navigate adolescence without succumbing to drugs. A youngster who is going through serious emotional difficulties is probably the likeliest candidate for involvement with drugs. A teacher may be able to help early in such a case. If he notices a marked alteration in a student's behavior—loss of interest in school and social relations, deterioration in physical condition and personal appearance, an inability to deal with school or personal problems—a teacher may be able to intervene by arranging for school counseling, or by contacting parents with a view to obtaining professional help for the youngster.

Experimentation should not be equated with serious abuse of drugs. It must be taken seriously by adults, of course, but panic reactions can only alienate a youngster, perhaps driving him away from, rather than toward, the adult support he needs.

No adult, and especially not a teacher, should identify hair length or outlandish dress with drug use. If one was ever a sure sign of the other, that time is past, and hostility or distrust based on appearance is sure to convince youngsters that the "generation gap" is unbridgeable.

2. Be well-informed about drugs and accurate in whatever you say about them.

Scare techniques used by well-intentioned adults to discourage drug use by the young have boomeranged and are largely responsible for the credibility gap between young and old on the subject of drugs. Youngsters often know a good deal about drugs and drug effects—or think they do. If an adult, especially a teacher, presents inaccurate information about any part of the subject, it tends to discredit whatever else he says about drugs. It is much better to say, "I don't know," if that is the case, than to undermine your credibility by misinformation.

Ultimately, every individual must decide the question of drug use for himself. Prevention, to be effective, must convince a student that drug use is not compatible with his personal goals. If the question is presented to young people as a matter of personal responsibility, they may see it that way, instead of looking on drug abuse as an act of rebellion against their elders.

3. Keep communication open.

An atmosphere of freedom and confidentiality can encourage a youngster to discuss his concerns with adults, and this is an important first step. If a youngster recognizes that his parents and teachers are making a genuine effort to understand his point of view, he is less likely to feel isolated and walled in by his own problems, whatever they may be.

Attitudes of panic and moral outrage are worse than useless in convincing young people of the dangers of drug use. Difficult as it is, it is important to avoid being moralistic and judgmental in talking about drugs and drug users with young people.

Many adults become defensive when discussing drugs with teenagers, especially when youngsters challenge the inconsistency of adults who condemn the use of drugs while they themselves use alcohol and tobacco. The inconsistencies can be granted, however, without destroying some good and convincing arguments against the use of drugs. Drug dependence, for instance, cannot be reconciled with the kind of activism needed to change a society so often criticized by young people.

It is important to remember that drugs cannot be discussed as though they were all alike. They are not, nor are the users of various drugs all alike. Users range from the chronic, heavy user who is psychologically or physically dependent on a drug to the onetime user who is experimenting out of curiosity. Users of hallucinogens may differ in both their personalities and their problems from users of a narcotic like heroin. Youngsters are generally aware of such distinctions, and the adult who speaks of all drug users as "addicts" will not be listened to long.

4. Understand the sources of drug abuse.

Remember that the generation gap works two ways. Adolescence is a lonely time for many youngsters; the teenager who feels isolated and unaccepted may turn to drugs for escape or for acceptance by a drug-using peer group. A sympathetic teacher's interest can make a great difference to a youngster who is temporarily out of step with the rest of the world. Even when a teacher is unable to solve the problem, he may be able to lead a student to the professional help he needs. Perhaps most important, a teacher can provide a model of an understanding adult who has no need to escape into a state of drugged unreality.

The effort to make a connection between the problem of drug abuse and the problems of growing up in this particular time and place is an effort to put a floor of understanding under the deep concern most adults feel about the abuse of drugs by the young. There is no fatalism intended: to say that drug abuse has its beginning in the difficulties youngsters experience as they grow up in a complex society is *not* to say that drug abuse is inevitable or unavoidable or irremediable. On the contrary, it is to suggest that those who are concerned about drug abuse and who would make their concern effective, need also to understand its sources in the world they share with young people.

Caring, alone, is not enough. What is needed is both caring and understanding. Adults must care enough to make the effort to understand, and understand enough to know how to offer help, and when, and for what. Intervention that only condemns the abuse of drugs is probably futile: the intervention that counts is that which deals with the problems, the needs, and the loneliness that make drugs attractive to youngsters. If adults can reach out to young people with both comprehension of their problems and compassion for their mistakes, then it may well come about that, in Shakespeare's words, "Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck the flower, safety."

REFERENCES USED IN THIS BOOK

Anderson, Margaret. ***Children of the South.*** New York: Dell, 1967.

Bettelheim, Bruno. Testimony before the Special Subcommittee on Education, U.S. House of Representatives, on Campus Unrest, 20 March 1969.

Birmingham, John, ed. ***Our Time Is Now: Notes from the High School Underground.*** New York: Praeger, 1970.

Bronfenbrenner, Urie. Somebody—let it, please God, be somebody. ***Time Magazine,*** 28 December 1970.

Bronfenbrenner, Urie. Parents, bring up your children! ***Look Magazine,*** 26 January 1971.

Brown, Bertram S. "Remarks at the White House Radio Executives Conference." 14 October 1970. Mimeographed.

Brown, Claude. ***Manchild in the Promised Land.*** New York: New American Library, 1965.

Chein, Isidor, et al. ***The Road to H: Narcotics, Delinquency, and Social Policy.*** New York: Basic Books, 1964.

Clark, Kenneth B. "A role for librarians in the relevant war against poverty." Wilson Library Bulletin, September 1965.

Cohen, Sidney. ***The Drug Dilemma.*** New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1969.

Cohen, Sidney. "Innovative Techniques of Drug Abuse Education and Prevention." Paper read at the International Institute for the Prevention and Treatment of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, 10 June 1970, at Lausanne, Switzerland. Mimeographed.

Coleman, James S., et al. ***Equality of Educational Opportunity.*** Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966.

Coles, Robert, and Piers, Maria. ***Wages of Neglect: New Solutions for Children of the Poor.*** Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969.

Conant, James B. ***Slums and Suburbs.*** New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.

Cooney, Joan Ganz. ***Quoted*** in ***Parade Magazine,*** 14 February 1971.

David, Jay, ed. ***Growing Up Black.*** New York: Pocket Books, 1968.

Dennison, George. ***The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School.*** New York: Vintage Books, 1970.

Divoky, Diane, ed. ***How Old Will You Be in 1984?*** New York: Avon Books, 1969.

Egoff, Sheila et al., ed. ***Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature.*** Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Friedenberg, Edgar. ***The Vanishing Adolescent.*** New York: Beacon Press, 1959.

Friedenberg, Edgar. ***Coming of Age in America.*** New York: Random House, 1965*a*.

Friedenberg, Edgar. ***The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms.*** Boston: Beacon Press, 1965*b*.

Goodman, Paul. ***Growing Up Absurd.*** New York: Vintage Books, 1956.

Goodman, Paul. ***Compulsory Mis-education.*** New York: Vintage Books, 1962.

Goro, Herb. ***The Block.*** New York: Vintage Books, 1970.

79

Greene, Mary Frances, and Ryan, Orletta. ***The Schoolchildren: Growing Up in the Slums.*** New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

Gregory, Dick. ***Nigger.*** New York: Pocket Books, 1964.

Gross, Beatrice, and Gross, Ronald, ed. ***Radical School Reform.*** New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.

Haley, Alex, ed. ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X.*** New York: Grove Press, 1965.

Harrington, Michael. ***The Other America: Poverty in the United States.*** Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1962.

Haskins, Jim. ***Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher.*** New York: Grove Press, 1969.

Hentoff, Nat. ***Our Children Are Dying.*** New York: The Viking Press, 1966.

Herndon, James. ***The Way It Spozed to Be.*** New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

Herzog, Elizabeth, et al. ***Youth Report No. 2: Teenagers Discuss "Problem" Drugs.*** Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971.

Hill, Theresa. I sit at this hard wooden desk. ***Media and Methods,*** April 1969.

Holt, John. ***How Children Fail.*** New York: Dell, 1964.

Holt, John. ***How Children Learn.*** New York: Dell, 1967.

Holt, John. ***The Underachieving School.*** New York: Dell, 1969.

Holt, John. ***What Do I Do Monday?*** New York: Dutton, 1970.

Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children. ***Crisis in Child Mental Health: Challenge for the 1970's.*** New York: Harper Trade Books, 1970.

Joseph, Stephen M., ed. ***The Me Nobody Knows: Children's Voices from the Ghetto.*** New York: Meridian Books, 1969.

Keniston, Kenneth. ***The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society.*** New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1960.

Kohl, Herbert R. ***36 Children.*** New York: New American Library, 1967.

Kohl, Herbert R. ***The Open Classroom.*** New York: New York Review Books, 1969.

Kron, Yves J., and Brown, Edward M. ***Mainline to Nowhere: The Making of a Heroin Addict.*** Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1965.

LeShan, Eda. ***Conspiracy Against Childhood.*** New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Louria, Donald B. ***The Drug Scene.*** New York: Bantam Books, 1968.

Mead, Margaret. Address presented to the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth (1950). Washington, D.C.

Menninger, Karl, et al. ***The Vital Balance: The Life Process in Mental Health and Illness.*** New York: The Viking Press, 1963.

Mosher, Loren R. Father absence and antisocial behavior in negro and white males. ***Acta Paedopsychiatrica,*** 1969, Vol. 36, fascicule 6/7.

National Education Association. ***Schools for the 70's and Beyond: A Cali To Action.*** Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1971.

National Institute of Mental Health. ***Resource Book for Drug Abuse Education.*** 1st ed. (Public Health Service Publication No. ***1964***). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969.

Nixon, Richard M. ***Message on Education Reform.*** 3 March 1970 at The White House, Washington, D.C. Mimeographed press release.

Offer, Daniel. ***The Psychological World of the Teen-Ager.*** New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Petersen, Robert C. ***Drug Abuse Prevention—A Quest for Alternatives.*** Paper read at the Conference on Drug Usage and Drug Subcultures, 11 February 1970, at Pacific Grove, California. Mimeographed.

Rainwater, Lee. ***Behind Ghetto Walls: Black Family Life in a Federal Slum.*** Chicago: Aldine, 1970.

Rode, Alex. Perceptions of parental behavior among alienated adolescents. ***Adolescence,*** Spring 1971.

Rosenberg, Morris. ***Society and the Adolescent Self-Image.*** Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Schaefer, Earl S. Can teachers help to stop drug abuse before it starts? ***Drug Abuse Prevention News for Teachers,*** Vol. IV, 1970–71.

Shellow, Robert, et al. Suburban runaways of the 1960's. Monograph of the Society for ***Research and Child Development.*** 32(3): Serial No. 111, 1967.

Silberman, Charles E. ***Crisis in Black and White.*** New York: Vintage Books, 1964.

Silberman, Charles E. ***Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education.*** New York: Random House, 1970.

Teague, Bob. ***Letters to a Black Boy.*** New York: Lancer Books, 1968.

Thomas, Piri. ***Down These Mean Streets.*** New York: New American Library, 1967.

1970 White House Conference on Children. Working Papers and Final Reports of the Forums. Washington, D.C. Mimeographed.

Yolles, Stanley F. The importance of being dad. ***Parade Magazine,*** 20 June 1965.

Yolles, Stanley F. Statement before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, on Control of Drug Abuse, 17 September 1969.

Appendix I:

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR TEACHERS:

Readable books for adults that give insight into the special problems of adolescents in today's America. Some current and popular books on schools and teaching are included.

UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE: AN ADULT'S GUIDE TO DRUGS AND THE YOUNG

Peter Marin and Allan Y. Cohen
(New York: Harper & Row, 1971)

Understanding Drug Use is a broad—and calm—overview of the sociological and psychological conditions of growing up today, and how these conditions are related to drug use. Isolation, no recognized and widely accepted "rites of passage" from childhood to adulthood, lack of training in how to cope with and to experience emotions and pleasure in nonchemical manners—these are some of the conditions under which adolescents must "come to terms with things." With such a complex matrix of elements, the authors stress there are no easy solutions.

Yet the situation is *not* hopeless, they maintain. Two chapters make specific suggestions about how adults who live and work with teenagers can prevent or lessen senseless drug abuse. "Stopgaps and What to Do," for example, discusses matters such as counseling drug users, coping with one's own uncertainties and lack of knowledge about and experience with drugs, and handling a drug crisis or "bad trip." Suggestions are made on what to do if a youngster absolutely insists on experimenting with or using drugs.

Another chapter, "Prevention—The Provision of Alternatives," outlines some courses of action for various community institutions, such as the schools and churches. These community agencies, the authors believe, can work together to provide the alternatives badly needed to offset some of the causes of drug abuse. Halfway houses, coffee houses, free and anonymous chemical analysis centers, cooperative stores, and perhaps temporary foster homes are some of the options that could be provided by the community for

its young. Education for all members of the community—youth and adult—is essential in any long-range prevention.

A useful section on drugs and their effects, a bibliography, a list of recommended films, and a glossary are also included.

Although understanding factual information about drugs is helpful, it is not enough, the authors feel, to prevent drug abuse. The matter is more basic and profound. Children and adults together must seek new ways to meet contemporary problems, and must try to improve the quality of life for all, regardless of age, the authors conclude.

THE FANTASTIC LODGE: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A GIRL DRUG ADDICT

Helen MacGill Hughes, ed.
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961)

The Fantastic Lodge is the autobiography of a young girl who was a drug addict, edited by Helen MacGill Hughes from tapes. The girl is called Janet Clark in the book, though that was not her name; she is dead now, of suicide committed a few years after she told her story.

Janet Clark was the child of a broken home. After her parents' divorce, she lived with her mother, an irresponsible, emotionally immature woman who had little of the psychological strength her growing daughter needed to give structure to her life. Janet had many relatives, but she received very little useful or supportive adult attention from them. Like many lonely adolescents before and after her, she took love wherever she could find it. At 18, she had a baby and gave her up for adoption. It was after that that Janet turned to the world of jazz and wild parties and marihuana and, eventually, heroin.

Heroin addiction is a world within a world. As Janet described it, "It's like belonging to some fantastic lodge, you know, but the initiation ceremony is a lot rougher." Her life as an addict was typical: hooked before she knew she was getting hooked, shoplifting, withdrawal sickness, attempts to kick the habit, returns to addiction, jail, and finally death, self-administered.

Janet's story would be no more than another statistic, except for her telling it. She was intelligent and very analytical. Her book discusses the process of addiction, its kicks and its causes, legal aspects, and the reactions of the nonaddicted to the addict. She opens up the closed world of the junkie as few other writers have done, and tells the truth in such a way that even those who live at a safe distance from the strange world can understand what her life was like. It wasn't much of a life, it was "simply the life of Janet Clark, who lived badly and will be remembered well."

THE ADDICT IN THE STREET

Jeremy Larner and Ralph Teffertaller
(Paperback edition—New York: Grove Press, 1964)

The Addict in the Street consists of a series of taped first-person accounts by herion users of what it is like to be a herion addict. As Larner explains in the introduction, their stories are "neither literary nor philosophic nor sociological nor scientific. In following them, we learn how the addict conceives of himself and the world he lives in."

These addicts matter-of-factly describe the ritual of "shooting up" or getting their "fix," the stealing and hustling "that's more work than working" to support their habits, and their efforts to escape their addiction. They tell, too, about dealing with pushers and police, fellow addicts, and probation officers. Their relationships with spouses, parents, and other relatives are also described in some detail; the book includes interviews with the mothers of two of the addicts.

The book offers a candid look at the addict's personality. For example, one writes, "I think most of us are afraid of people. . . . I would look at addicts as poor, disillusioned people. . . .They're all very meek . . . and very afraid." Withdrawal psychologically from heroin addiction and its euphoria is very difficult: "Once you're high you don't have to worry about anything . . . you just sit back and all your problems are gone for a few hours and that's it."

Broken marriages, crime, prostitution, shattered relations with family, friends, society—every kind of degradation haunts the addict, and the pages of this book. No one knows better than the addict himself the waste of a life of addiction:

> I should be so far ahead of myself! I should have so much money in the bank, I should have so much clothes, a wife. . . . I should have a beautiful home now. I've made money, I've made good money, honest. And it all went into somebody else's arm; it went to put a pusher behind the wheel of a Cadillac; it went to put somebody up in a penthouse. And me: I gotta roll in dirt, suffer pain, go to hospitals, beat people for money, lie. . . . I wish they'd wipe narcotics off the face of the earth.

MANCHILD IN THE PROMISED LAND

Claude Brown
(New York: Macmillan, 1965)
(Paperback edition—New York: The New American Library, 1965)

Manchild in the Promised Land is the autobiographical account of Claude Brown's growing up in Harlem, New York, in the 1950's. Rich in detail and told with great personal warmth, it is perhaps the only book that tells an outsider, as Norman Mailer said, what it would be like day to day to grow up in Harlem.

Claude Brown's parents were part of that generation of Southern Negroes who migrated to New York in the thirties and forties in search of jobs, decent housing, and opportunity for themselves and their children—the "promised land." What they found was a slum ghetto where life was as narrow and as hopeless as the rural poverty of the South, but very different, all the same. There was hate and bitterness in a city slum, and there was a terrible street life that took the children young and corrupted them beyond recall. Claude Brown's book is about the growing years of the second generation, the children of those hopeful migrants, for whom there was no more "promised land" to look forward to, for whom there was only Harlem.

Harlem in the 1950's was engulfed by a wave of narcotics; heroin addiction was, as Brown terms it again and again in his writing, a "plague" that struck particularly hard at those of his generation:

> Drugs were killing just about everybody off in one way or another. It had taken over the neighborhood, the entire community. I didn't know of one family in Harlem with three or more kids between the ages of fourteen and nineteen in which at least one of them wasn't on drugs. This was just how it was. It was like a plague, and the plague usually afflicted the eldest child of every family, like the one of the firstborn with Pharaoh's people in the Bible. . . . It was as though drugs were a ghost, a big ghost, haunting the community.

Manchild chronicles the descent of many adolescents into a cycle of drug addiction, crime, and degradation, and finally, prison or death. And because so many of those who succumbed were Brown's friends, the cost of the deadly cycle in human terms is always apparent in his writing. Brown's own life is a success story. He went through the common syndrome of a ghetto adolescence: street life, crime, reform school—but he avoided the drug addiction that finished so many of his contemporaries, and in time, he broke out of the confines of a ghetto childhood to finish school and go on to college and law school. But Brown's escape from the usual ghetto fates was so unusual that it serves mainly as dramatic contrast in a tale that is generally tragic. For anyone who cares to understand the relationship between the ghetto environment and narcotic addiction, ***Manchild in the Promised Land*** is indispensable reading.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley
(Paperback edition—New York: Grove Press, 1965)

The Autobiography of Malcolm X was characterized by the *New York Times* review as "brilliant, painful and important." It is all of that. It is the life story of a man who knew the worst that society could do to a black man, and who rose above the worst to become a passionate spokesman for the freedom and dignity of black people in America. Malcolm X was not a comfortable leader from the point of view of white society; he was a strong man with strong hates, and he deliberately used shock tactics against the injustices of American society toward blacks. This full-length portrait shows the sources of his outrage, the progress of his thinking, and the complexity of his personality. It also gives the reader an understanding of the place of Malcolm X in the long struggle of the American Negro for self-respect and in the Negro Revolution which began in the 1950's.

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little and did most of his growing up in Lansing, Michigan. His father died when Malcolm was 6. Without his support, the family was soon in trouble and on welfare. When Malcolm was 12, his mother succumbed to mental illness and was sent to the State hospital, and Malcolm's childhood came to an end. From that time on until he became a Muslim, the story of Malcolm Little's life is the story of a downward spiral into crime, drug abuse, and degradation. At 17, he went to Harlem to live. There he became a hustler, an accomplished criminal and pusher of drugs; in time, an addict, and finally, a convict. In prison, he began the study that led him to the Black Muslim movement and to transformation as a person. Once out of prison, he quickly rose to a position of leadership within the Muslim movement.

The Autobiography traces not only Malcolm X's rise to power and influence within the Muslim movement and his transformation from criminal, addict, and convict to a man of Puritan austerity and self-discipline, it chronicles a remarkable intellectual development. From a violent and articulate racist, Malcolm X developed, before the end of his life, into a man free of hatred, but still passionately committed to freedom for black people. Looking back on his past just two days before his murder, Malcolm observed "That was a mad scene. The sickness and madness of those days! I'm glad to be free of them." A new chapter seemed about to open when his life ended.

Malcolm X was and is a fascinating, controversial personality. Alex Haley, in the epilogue to the book, describes him as "that rarest thing in the world among us Negroes: a true man." It is doubtless this quality that has made him a hero to many young blacks; the force and brilliance of his character come through on every page of this book.

OUR CHILDREN ARE DYING

Nat Hentoff
(New York: The Viking Press, 1966)
(Paperback edition—New York: The Viking Press, 1966)

One thesis of Hentoff's book is that the children of slum schools are "dying"; he means that they are failing to learn and are doomed by this failure to continue into adult life the poverty and despair they have known as children in the slums. The other thesis is that this ***need not be.*** The reason for the failure of children in slum schools is not, Hentoff's book suggests, in the children, nor is it an inevitable result of the slum environment, neighborhoods, homes, or families. The main reason for the failure of children in slum schools lies in the schools themselves.

Basically, this is a book about one man, Dr. Elliott Shapiro, the principal of P.S. 119, an elementary school in Harlem, New York, and about the school he administered. In Dr. Shapiro and P.S. 119 as he ran it, Hentoff found refutation of all despairing counsels about how the successful education of slum children must await "across the board" changes in all aspects of their lives. Dr. Shapiro believes in children—all children—and their ability to learn. He believes in teachers and in their ability to create an atmosphere of acceptance and hopefulness in which learning is possible. Most important of all for his school and the children in it, Dr. Shapiro was willing to fight for these beliefs against all that bureaucracy, rigidity, and disinterest could do to obstruct an administrator who tried to buck the system.

Hentoff does not claim, as he himself says in the introduction, that Elliott Shapiro performed educative miracles. "In his school, too, children are dying, but fewer are dying than if he were not there." What Shapiro accomplished in P.S. 119 could show the way for all schools. Hentoff believes Shapiro's "concepts of education, if applied in slum schools throughout the country, could save many more children—and now." In this book, Hentoff draws a portrait of a remarkable educator and shows his educative concepts in practice.

36 CHILDREN

Herbert Kohl
(New York: The New American Library, 1967)
(Paperback edition—New York: The New American Library, 1967)

On the first day of school, one of Herbert Kohl's 36 black, sixth-grade students in a Harlem elementary school asked, "Mr. Kohl, what are you

87

teaching us for?" Kohl answers that question in this thoughtful and human account of how he and the 36 children learned together. Kohl provides a blend of clear description, his own insights based on his careful observations, and a great many examples of what the students themselves—many of whom were considered at least slow, if not almost retarded—wrote during the year.

The classroom—"barren, . . . no books, . . . broken windows and desks, falling plaster, and oppressive darkness—was in a neighborhood characterized by one of the students as a "junky's paradise." That "we didn't know each other's lives" seemed the greatest problem to Kohl—a white, Harvard graduate. Yet he worked to overcome this problem by being both "an observer of his class as well as a member of it" and also by "observing his own effect upon the class as much as possible." Kohl oberved several things: that children fear chaos and have a keen internal sense of adjustment that tries to counteract or avoid chaos; that "fear is only overcome through risk and experimentation"; that the children wanted more than anything to feel they were facing it with me and not against me."

The curriculum in Kohl's room extended far beyond the restrictions of textbooks and Harlem. One of the most exciting sequences in the book tells how a student's insult provided a springboard into Greek mythology and the study of language itself. "The class became word-hungry and concept-hungry, concerned with discovering the 'right' word to use at a given time to express a specific thought." Much of Kohl's influence on the children came by example; he himself wrote every assignment he asked the class to do, and also did his own "homework" and research with the class as they explored different topics.

Though he does not underestimate the difficulties, Kohl's honesty with himself and his teaching keeps him and the book from any note of despair:

> Without hope and without cynicism, I try to make myself available to my pupils. I believe neither that they will succeed nor that they will fail. I know they will fight, falter, and rise again and again, and that if I have the strength I will be there to rejoice and cry with them, and to add my little weight to easing the burden of being alive in the United States today.

This, then, is Kohl's answer to "What are you teaching us for?"

THE WAY IT SPOZED TO BE

James Herndon
(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968)
(Paperback edition—New York: Bantam, 1968)

James Herndon in ***The Way It Spozed to Be*** records his experiences during one year as a new teacher in a large ghetto junior high school whose student

body was 98 percent black and "socially deprived." His purpose in writing this highly readable, often humorous, account is straightforward: "In this book I'm trying to tell you about my year teaching—learning to teach—in a public school, a year spent in a particular school, at a particular time, and with particular students. These particulars are my anecdote." He tells how his own philosophy and approach in working with both classes and individual students evolved over the year, how he sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed, how he faced serious differences with both administrators and colleagues.

Much of the advice Herndon received on every side contradicted his own assessment of and regard for his students. One teacher advised him, "Don't ever push 'em and don't expect too much." A special consultant was more blunt: "Teaching these children is like training animals." His principal recommended voice lessons so that Herndon would develop a "tone of command." Even his students told him that he should give assignments (which they had no intention of doing) because he was "spozed to."

Herndon developed his own understanding of his students, however. He saw them as adolescents who had never had a chance to be children; as youngsters afraid to try something different because of possible hidden dangers; as students who would and could learn if not threatened by the school environment.

Because he was willing to listen and follow the leads the youngsters offered, Herndon was able to establish reading groups, language groups, library periods, play readings, and other activities which had student support and participation—even if they didn't follow the usual dictums of regular assignments, daily homework, tests, and the like. He capitalized on student interests wherever he found them. For instance, during a "slam book" craze (slam books were illegally circulated notebooks in which students commented candidly about classmates), most teachers tried to eradicate the books because they were disruptive to "order." Herndon, however, welcomed the suddent interest in writing:

> All I could see was that they'd finally come across something that needed to be written down to be successful or interesting to them, which couldn't even exist without writing, and they were doing it as enthusiastically as possible.

In his recounting of the particulars of his year, the fundamental differences in attitude and methodology between his classroom and the school as a whole—with its emphasis on control and rigidity—become so pronounced that his eventual dismissal from the school seems inevitable. His interest, finally, in telling his story is that "if just the particulars can be kept clear, then there will be a kind of thing made, something to see. . . . The interpretations may then be as numerous as readers."

TEACHING WITH FEELING: COMPASSION AND SELF-AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM TODAY

Dr. Herbert M. Greenberg
(Toronto: Macmillan, 1969)
(Paperback edition—New York: Pegasus, 1969)

"The humanity of the teacher is the vital ingredient if children are to learn. . . . The human, emotional qualities are the very heart of teaching. . . . These feelings will be viewed openly and realistically in an effort to show how their impact on the teacher's performance in the classroom can be minimized." This major thesis in ***Teaching With Feeling*** does not minimize the importance of children's emotions; it does suggest that children's emotions and needs can be best met if the teacher understands clearly his own emotions and how they affect his dealings with his students. Greenberg's practical and readable approach draws freely on many examples of situations familiar to most teachers, including beginners.

Before he takes up specifics, Greenberg discusses the two levels of reality, outward and inward, which influence teachers in the classroom. The outward level includes the obvious circumstances, such as excitement the day before vacation, a painful migraine headache, payday, a serious fight between the students—these all influence the teachers.

But in addition to this "outer reality," eleven common institutional myths about teaching, such as the "myth of calmness" and the "I love all children myth," constitute an "inner reality" with which each teacher must also cope as he goes about his daily teaching. Teachers and others should examine these myths carefully and thoughtfully, Greenberg maintains, because "they secretly whisper to the teacher a barrage of shoulds and should-nots . . . they sap the teacher's inner strengths by weakening his self-confidence and denying the uniqueness of each teacher as a separate, special human being."

In this framework, then, Greenberg discusses common classroom problems and situations: a teacher's personal likes and dislikes, racial prejudice in the classroom, anger, discipline, relations with colleagues and parents. One chapter, for example, discusses "Surviving the First Year" and another examines the "middle-class shock" that some inner-city school teachers experience. These discussions center in particular on the teacher's feelings and emotions as he deals with these situations. Although he attempts no specific solutions, Greenberg suggests approaches and ways of viewing the situations that might be less emotionally debilitating for the teachers.

Greenberg believes that teachers (and parents, too) who "gaze within themselves and recognize the common humanity of their feelings" could take "a significant step toward countering those immensely powerful dehumanizing trends that have unfortunately been developing in education, in parenthood, and in other crucial areas of our lives." He concluded that it is the uniqueness of each teacher—when understood and accepted—that

"exercises the greatest influence on a child's development. This truly is teaching at it's best."

THE OPEN CLASSROOM: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO A NEW WAY OF TEACHING

Herbert R. Kohl
(Paperback edition—New York: New York Review, 1969)

From his experience as a ghetto school teacher and subsequent conversations with teachers of many backgrounds and experiences, Herbert Kohl, author of ***Teaching the "Unteachable"*** and ***36 Children,*** discovered that many teachers want—and some have managed already—to provide classrooms that encourage real learning and creativity, where both students and teachers are free to be unique individuals. ***The Open Classroom: A Practical Guide to a New Way of Teaching*** is a brief, simply written statement of how Kohl believes such a classroom can be established. Although he warns that each teacher must come to his own particular solutions for his situation, Kohl tries "to anticipate problems, to present possibilities, and make suggestions."

Kohl appreciates the difficulty of change for himself and others: "My beliefs in a free, non-authoritarian classroom always ran ahead of my personal ability to teach in one." Nonetheless, he indicates some steps a teacher might take if he decides to change his classroom atmosphere. For example, a teacher can suspend his expectations about whether the class (or student) will be good or bad, fast or slow, and instead, allow the class freedom to develop its own strengths and qualities instead of maintaining past roles. Some teachers devote 10 minutes a day to exploring students' interests in order to involve everyone in deciding what should happen in a class. In any case, the teacher doesn't disappear, but instead, is a resource if needed, an adult who is willing to listen and talk. The teacher ceases to be "a director, a judge, or an executioner."

Kohl gives specific suggestions about dealing with problems, such as noise and disorder that may result from new activities, and comments about maintaining amiable relations with colleagues in an authoritarian school system. "Survival is always an issue," he remarks, "the teacher . . . has to believe it is worth it to himself and to his students."

"To have a free classroom is to present an environment where many people can discover themselves, and there is no simple set of rules to prescribe how this can be created," Kohl concludes. "To try and break away from stupid schooling is no easy matter for teacher or students. . . . Yet to make such an escape is a step toward beginning again and becoming the teachers we never knew we could be."

Apendix II:

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR STUDENTS

Books for young people, mostly fiction, that deal honestly with some contemporary problems of growing up. The stories will hold the attention of most students from about 6th grade through junior high, as well as provide a springboard for discussions led by teachers.

THE GRASS PIPE

Robert Coles
(Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1969)
(Paperback edition—New York: Dell, 1969)

The Grass Pipe is Dr. Coles' attempt to encase medically sound information about marihuana in a story, presumably to make the informational content seem palatable and relevant to youngsters of junior high school age. Dr. Coles explains: "This book is about the use of marihuana by young people, boys and girls of, say, 13 or 14. Whether we like it or not, young Americans of those ages have taken and are taking drugs like marihuana. The book aims, in a fictional way, to indicate what may trouble some children, what they may be looking for through drugs, and what effect those drugs undoubtedly have on a person's thoughts and feelings. I have tried to bring alive an important social problem. . . ."

The book concerns three 14-year-old boys who are friends, their family backgrounds and problems, and their experimentation with marihuana. It consists almost entirely of conversation, mostly among the three boys. The family problems are the familiar ones in a suburban setting: fathers who are too busy to spend time with their children, unresolved differences between husbands and wives, alienation of the young from their parents. The experiment with pot is described in careful detail, including a nearly clinical description of the effect of marihuana on the two boys who are trying it for the first time. These two are sufficiently unsettled by their experience to go

to the father of one of them, a doctor, for advice and information. The remainder of the book is devoted to the doctor's lecture to the boys on the subject of marihuana and its effects, both physical and legal.

Unfortunately, reviewers have considered the book dull as fiction. The information on marihuana, however, is accurate, and the fictional framework could lend itself to discussion by junior high school students. The connection between the boys' family problems and their use of pot is certainly suggested and may well serve to start debate on the reasons for drug experimentation.

Questions for Discussion

1. Is this a believable story?
2. If you had teenagers, would you let them drink at home?
3. How old should a youngster be to decide for himself about smoking or drinking?
4. Who was really responsible for the boys' smoking marihuana?
5. Could the boys' parents have prevented their experiment with pot?

Topics for Discussion

adult drug use
parental indifference to children
influence of marital problems on children
dangers of marihuana

VIVA CHICANO

Frank Bonham
(New York: Dutton, 1970)

Viva Chicano is the story of Joaquin—"Keeny"—Duran, a Mexican-American boy growing up in urban California. Keeny lost his father at 6, but kept the pride in *la raza* that his father had taught him. His mother, hysterical and unstable, embarked on a series of unfortunate marriages after Keeny's father's death, and Keeny found his home life unbearable. From the age of 7, he was in trouble: truant, runaway, thief. He is 17 when this story opens, on probation from his last run-in with the law, and also on the verge of serious trouble, a pattern that is characteristic for many Chicano youths.

Drugs run all through the story, and are a part of adolescent life in the Mexican-American barrio where Keeny lives. One boy in Keeny's group—not

quite a gang, but near enough to it to make the police suspicious—is a heroin addict and his problems with drugs are clearly special. For the rest, pills and grass are routine answers to boredom and personal troubles. Keeny, too, has used pills, but he is portrayed as making an effort to stay off drugs while on probation. Once in the story, he uses "downers" (barbiturates) when troubles pile up. The description of his physical reaction is accurate, neither exaggerated nor attractive; all he gains is temporary oblivion, though of course, that is all he expected. Keeny is no experimenter where drugs are concerned. He and his friends are well acquainted with whatever effects can be had from the available drug supply.

The overall picture of Keeny's life is altogether convincing: his difficult, upsetting home life, the dreariness of the project where he lives, the narrowness of his chances at a hopeful future, his feeling that he is trapped by life and doomed by his police record. Mr. Bonham understands very well the aimlessness of adolescents like Keeny and his friends, who get in trouble mostly because they have nothing better to do.

The climax of the story involves Keeny's engineering of an incident which lands him in court with a serious charge against him. He is not guilty: the put-on was staged to prove, as Keeny explains to the judge, that anyone who has a record is "guilty until proved innocent." Neither the scheme nor the outcome is quite believable; the judge quite readily accepts Keeny's story, the Parole Officer is judicious and perceptive, and there is a place for Keeny to go which is neither reform school nor home. Unfortunately, the ideal foster home to which Keeny is assigned seldom exists in real life, and thus the optimistic note of the book's ending rings a bit false.

But junior high school teenagers will like ***Viva Chicano,*** and reluctant readers of high school age may enjoy it as well. Bonham is a tried and true author for these two groups.

Questions for Discussion

1. Are Keeny and his friends anything like anyone you know?
2. Do you think you know why Keeny and his friends took drugs?
3. Were Keeny and his friends drug addicts?
4. Was it better for Keeny to live away from home, or should he have stayed with his mother?
5. Do you think people have reasons for choosing particular kinds of drugs to take—for instance, are there reasons why some use LSD and others use heroin?

Topics for Discussion

living in a project
problems of having a police record
"bad" home life
legal rights of minors

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DRUGS

Dr. Charles W. Gorodetzky and Dr. Samuel T. Christian
(New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970)

What You Should Know About Drugs is an excellent factual book designed for children of upper elementary and junior high school age. It is clearly written in language that youngsters in this age group can understand, and well illustrated with many photographs in color. The authors are well-qualified specialists in the field of drug study and research. Dr. Gorodetzky is currently Chief of the section for Drug Metabolism and Kinetics at the National Institute of Mental Health's Addiction Research Center in Lexington, Kentucky. Dr. Christian is Chief of the Biochemical Pharmacology section of the NIMH Addiction Research Center. Both authors have written and lectured on the subject of drugs and drug abuse.

The book is exactly what is needed for children who are not yet able to make use of material written for senior high school and college levels. The material is clearly and unemotionally presented, without the slightest moralizing overtone. Above all, it is accurate. The dangers of drugs and their abuse are made evident; so are the good things about drugs used under medical supervision.

In the last, very brief chapter, the authors make plain their own position on drug abuse as a solution for problems, and as a way to get kicks. Drugs often add to existing problems, they point out, and kicks do not last long. The injustices and inequalities of our society are not changed by those who drop out.

At the same time, they do not minimize the difficulties youngsters may encounter in avoiding drug use if they are exposed to it: "Saying no can be terribly hard. You may feel that you might lose your friends if they take drugs and you don't want to. Unfortunately, this may be true." The authors urge young people to learn all they can about drugs, their dangers and consequences, for, as the last sentence of the book says, "In the end the decision will be yours."

The book is indexed and there is a useful glossary of terms.

Questions for Discussion

1. Is the information in this book presented objectively?
2. Do you thing the authors understand why people take drugs?
3. Do you think alcohol should be included in a discussion of drugs like marihuana, LSD, etc.?
4. Do the authors present convincing reasons for not taking drugs?
5. Would this book influence your decision about drugs?

Topics for Discussion

physical effects of drugs
medical uses of drugs
legal aspects of drug use
peer pressure to use drugs

ESCAPE FROM NOWHERE

Jeanette Eyerly
(Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969)
(Paperback edition—New York: Berkley, 1969)

Escape from Nowhere is a girl's book which attempts to connect some of the more familiar suburban family problems with the high school drug scene in the suburbs. On the whole, the book is convincing; the story moves swiftly, the details are authentic, and the characterizations are adequate, if not deep.

The atmosphere of a middle-class, ambitious, and upwardly mobile family in the suburbs is well captured. Carla Devon's father is doing very well in his business career and spends most of his time away from home. Her mother, with her favored daughter away at college and only Carla left at home, is lonely and bored and drinks too much. Carla is a good student but no beauty, awkward, and a little overweight. She and her mother have little in common, and Carla naturally resents the comparisons with her pretty, popular sister, and her mother's total preoccupation with knowing the "right people." Most of all, Carla is horrified when she realizes the extent of her mother's drinking.

Running from the house one night when she has found her mother drunk, Carla meets Dexter Smither, a fellow high school student who is already thoroughly involved with various drugs. He soon initiates her into pot smoking, assuring her that pot and pills are the answer to her problems. And so it seems to Carla—for awhile. Slowly, she becomes frightened by her reactions and by her increasing dependence on the marihuana highs, but she doesn't know how to get out.

The situation is resolved by disaster. Dexter injects himself with an overdose. Carla, terrified, goes for help and is arrested for possession of drugs. Dexter ends in a mental hospital with the prognosis for full recovery very much in doubt, since no one knows how many drugs Dex has experimented with or in what concentrations. Carla's parents stand by her, as do her teachers, and her own prognosis is good at the book's close.

The book is honest in its treatment of the high school drug scene, but the message is never in any doubt. Drugs look pretty unattractive as a solution to personal problems, and Dexter's bad end is scarcely a surprise. Carla's

disenchantment is convincing; by the time the story ends, she is well past the stage of finding adolescent pro-drug arguments at all persuasive:

> Marcie's talk about "rational decisions" and people doing their "own thing" was almost more than I could stand to listen to. I wondered what she'd say if I told her I had smoked pot, not because of any soul-searching, but that I'd gotten into it by accident. And that once I'd gotten in, I didn't know how to get out. For a while, smoking pot had made me forget how lousy and unsatisfactory my life really was. But nothing had really changed. Now I knew that the only thing that would change it much was me.

There is a strong suggestion in the last chapter, however, that Carla's parents too, will also try to make her life more satisfactory.

Escape from Nowhere is very much a "teenage novel," complete with a hint—but no more—of romance for Carla. It is best for junior high school or early high school girls; certainly it is not for the highly sophisticated high school crowd.

Questions for Discussion

1. What would you do about an alcoholic parent?
2. How could Carla have discussed with her mother the way she felt about being compared with Diana?
3. If you were in Carla's shoes, might it lead you to try pot?
4. Do you ever feel as though there is no escape?
5. Would friends have made Carla's life easier?

Topics for Discussion

alcoholism
loneliness
drugs, especially marihuana
suburban life for teenagers

DURANGO STREET

Frank Bonham
(New York: Dutton, 1965)
(Paperback edition—New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1965)

Durango Street is a strong and realistic story of adolescence in a West Coast black ghetto. Rufus Henry, the central character, has just been re-

leased from a reformatory when the story begins. He is on parole and supposed to avoid joining any of the teenage gangs in his home area. Rufus is an attractive character. He is black, intelligent, and strongly individualistic. He has plenty of pride and a talent for leadership. Bonham shows convincingly how impossible it would be for Rufus to survive without joining a gang. Gangs are a way of life where Rufus lives, and the loner can scarcely hope to survive, in the most literal sense. In fact, the atmosphere of life-and-death struggle in a world where the weak perish quickly is one of the strongest features of the book. The dilemma is much less that of black-white relations, which really figure hardly at all in the story, than of the lack of close, trusting relationships between people of any color.

Rufus does join a gang and he also soon becomes its leader—which puts him in charge not only of the gang's activities but, to some extent, of his own destiny as well. The story centers around Rufus' increasing sense of self-respect and the hope that he can affect, if not entirely control, his own future In this, he has the help of an understanding social worker, Alex Robbins, who tries to make Rufus and other youngsters caught in the ghetto world aware of alternatives. The ending is ambiguous as it should be, since to suggest that the answers to such problems as the ghetto spawns are either simple or easy would be wholly false. Yet there is clearly hope for Rufus.

Drugs are not an important element in ***Durango Street,*** but all the background conditions—the poverty, the broken homes, the struggle for survival—that lie behind so much ghetto drug use are sharply portrayed. Especially well conveyed is the feeling of trapped helplessness so often felt by youngsters growing up in the slums: "They might as well have thrown away the key the first time they jailed me." It's a strong, honest, and effectitve book for junior high and early high school readers.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are the police and social workers so little help to Rufus?
2. Why did Rufus' mother let him think Ernie Brown was his father?
3. Was Rufus wrong to join a gang?
4. Was Alex Robbins able to show Rufus and his friends some new alternatives?
5. What do you think will become of Rufus?

Topics for Discussion

gang
growing up in a ghetto
reputation
street violence

THE CONTENDER

Robert Lipsyte
(New York: Harper & Row, 1967)
(Paperback edition—New York: Bantam Books, 1967)

The Contender is a powerful, absorbing story about a crucial year in a boy's life. The background is Harlem—and poverty and prejudice; the story is Alfred's struggle to achieve self-respect and identify against enormous odds. And it is the battle within Alfred that is important, far more so than the environment.

Alfred, at 17, is a high school dropout. He has a job sweeping out a store, and a future that promises very little else. Alfred himself is straight and would like to stay that way, but his friends are beginning to get into store burglaries, drugs, and other trouble. It seems only a matter of time before Alfred is also drawn into the fatal spiral of adolescent crime and drug addiction.

But Alfred finds his salvation when he decides to become a boxer. He begins to train and slowly discovers within himself an unexpected capacity for self-discipline that transforms his outlook. He achieves pride and self-respect, and with them, an acceptance of others. He no longer views the world around him as totally hostile and hopeless, nor his own future as fixed within the narrow limits of the ghetto.

But this is no ordinary tale of triumph in which the hero goes from success to success. Far more realistic than that, it is the story of how one boy learns the truth of what the gym manager tells him at the outset of his training as a boxer: "It's the climbing that makes the man." In the end, in fact, Alfred decides that he is *not* cut out to be a successful boxer, but by that time he knows that he has courage, staying power, and enough determination to learn whatever he wants to learn. He has become a man.

A counterplot involves Alfred's best friend, James, whose life is the pattern of what Alfred's might have been. James is caught robbing a store, acquires a police record, and becomes addicted to heroin. At the end of the book, Alfred offers his strength to help James out of the pit of addiction and despair.

The Contender is simply written and fast-moving; it is also honest and profound. Though Alfred's character is well-defined and the Harlem background is accurate and specific, the story is really universal. Alfred's struggle toward self-identity is that of every young person. His need to satisfy himself about his own strengths and to know from direct experience his capabilities is the need of every adolescent making the transition from childhood to maturity.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the role of race prejudice in the story?

2. What did Alfred learn at the gym?
3. What made Alfred's life and James' life so different?
4. Why did Alfred fight the last fight?
5. Will Alfred succeed in getting James off drugs?

Topics for Discussion

discovering who you are
definitions of courage
heroin addiction
self-discipline

THE MIMOSA TREE

Vera and Bill Cleaver
(Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970)

The Mimosa Tree is the story of a North Carolina family driven by hard times from their scrub farm to the slums of Chicago, where they hoped to "make money." On one level, it is an account of a poor rural family's encounter with city poverty, Government bureaucracy, and human inhumanity. On another level, it is the story of children placed in a situation where the ethics they have been taught will not allow them to survive in a new and desperate situation, and of the decisions they make in the face of their needs.

The authors have arranged the structure of the story in such a way as to make the two oldest children, 14 and 10 years of age, responsible for doing whatever is necessary for the survival of the family. The father of the five children is blind and cannot work; his wife, the children's stepmother, abandons them all a few weeks after they arrive in Chicago, leaving them with no certain source of income. Their application for "free money"—welfare—doesn't move quickly enough to be of use. Faced with the real possibility of starvation, and tutored by a 10-year-old slum neighbor who has had to make his own way for years, the children turn to stealing. But especially for Marvella, the 14-year-old girl and the one on whom the responsibility falls most heavily, the conflict between theft and her ingrained principles goes deep. Looking at the people around her in the slum where they live, she recognizes what will become of her own family if they stay. And so, making the decision for all of them, she decides they must go back home, and they do.

What is most interesting in ***The Mimosa Tree,*** and unusual in a children's book written at about fifth- or sixth-grade level, is the close and relatively complex tie that is made between social conditions and the behavior of people. At the same time, clear moral judgments are made. Slum people

behave as they do because of how they must live; nevertheless, Marvella refuses to give up and become like them. She understands, but she does not lose sight of right and wrong. This is an interesting book to discuss with children old enough to grasp the consequences of desperation.

Questions for Discussion

1. What makes a good neighbor?
2. What do you think of the treatment of the Profitt family by the Government people?
3. Could stealing by Frank be justified?
4. Is it easier to be poor in the country or in the city?
5. Was Marvella right to refuse to take Frank back home with them?

Topics for Discussion

welfare
country (rural) vs. city poverty
situation ethics
cultural shock

IT'S WINGS THAT MAKE BIRDS FLY: THE STORY OF A BOY

Sandra Weiner
(New York: Pantheon Books, 1968)

It's Wings That Make Birds Fly is a look into the life of a 10-year-old black boy living in New York City. His name is Otis Bennett. He tells his own story, in his own words, in a book illustrated with photographs on every page. Both words and photographs are direct and simple and full of personality. The book should appeal to children of about nine or ten.

There's no real story to what Otis tells in these pages, but he does reveal a great deal about his life in his outlook on it. His parents are separated, and Otis lives first with one grandmother, then with the other. He ran away from his Grandma Mitchell when she beat him. He sees his parents at times; he knows his brothers and sisters, and misses them because he is not living with them.

Otis is a warm-hearted, observant, very likable boy. He wants to be good; he is most understanding of why his grandmother Mitchell tried to keep him out of bad company. School is an important place for Otis. His teacher—

"She knows my name"—is an important person in his life. He is very much aware of what he does well in school and of what he doesn't know very well: "I don't know my division and I don't know how to write or read so good." Most of Otis' reactions to the world around him are positive; "I like" is a staple of the conversation recorded in this book. He likes his brothers and sisters, he likes his friends, and animals and the country, and especially, he likes birds. He is full of hope, even about some of the disadvantages of his life: "Someday maybe we can live in a good building like other peoples do."

A perceptive teacher could make much of this book in discussing growing up with children. Many of the problems of an inner-city childhood are indirectly rather than directly reflected in Otis' narrative. Younger children may respond to this firsthand presentation as they would not to a more objective and abstract setting-out of "problems."

Questions for Discussion

1. Would the book be as effective without the pictures?
2. Is Otis lonely?
3. Does hitting children make them good?
4. Should you be friends with kids your family thinks are bad?
5. Why does Otis have so many bad dreams?

Topics for Discussion

broken families
changing schools
teachers
children's ambitions

THE JAZZ MAN

Mary Hays Weik
(New York: Atheneum, 1966)

The Jazz Man is a fictional treatment of some of the sad realities of slum living. Its format seems to indicate that it is meant for young children; almost picture-book size, it has moderately large print and many illustrations. But the story is both too subtle and too sad for very young children; the book is probably best suited to children of at least 9 or 10, or older.

It is the story of Zeke, a 9-year-old black boy who lives with his mother

and father in Harlem. Zeke has never gone to school; the family has moved frequently enough to avoid getting on school rolls and besides, Zeke hides when the "school man" comes around. Zeke spends his days alone in the apartment while his parents work. After the Jazz Man moves into the room across the court from Zeke's window, his days are filled with the enchantment of the music of the Jazz Man's piano. But glimmers of trouble between mother and father filter through the simple text and, after a little while, Zeke's mother leaves. Then his father leaves, and Zeke is alone in the apartment. soon he is hungry, then sick. He dreams of finding somebody . . . who knew all about him . . . and who still loved him. Even the Jazz Man has gone away.

The ending is dreamlike and equivocal. Hungry and sick, Zeke dreams that he hears the Jazz Man playing again and that he goes down the stairs, across the street and into the tavern where the Jazz Man is playing with a jazz band. He pinches himself to test the dream—and wakes, to find his mother and father have returned. Or is he really awake now? Or only so sick that he slides from dream to dream? It is hard to know what the final pages really intend to convey, but the realism of the story as a whole is not at all equivocal and it is very powerful; the working parents, the father who has trouble holding a job and who turns to drink when things go badly, the little boy left alone with few and rather fragile connections with reality. The writing is simple and very good, and the whole book can be an excellent springboard for discussion among children old enough to understand without being overpowered by it.

Questions for Discussion

1. Does this story seem real?
2. Why was the Jazz Man important to Zeke?
3. Did dreams help Zeke escape the problems of his life?
4. Did Zeke's parents love him?
5. How would you have ended the story?

Topics for Discussion

abandoned children
dreams vs. reality
loneliness
poverty

THE CITY IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Arnold Adoff, ed.
(New York: Macmillan, 1969)

I AM THE DARKER BROTHER: AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN POEMS BY BLACK AMERICANS

Arnold Adoff, ed.
(New York: Macmillan, 1970)
(Paperback edition—New York: Collier Books, Macmillan, 1970)

These are two anthologies of modern poetry, both *small* volumes—just a little over a hundred pages—meant for youngsters of upper elementary or junior high school age. The physical format of both books is extremely attractive; poems are well-placed on the page, with plenty of white space around the type. Only one poem is on each page, even when the poem is very brief. Illustrations in each book are black and white and very attractive.

The poetry has been carefully selected to reflect contemporary urban life and, particularly in the case of ***I am the Darker Brother,*** Negro American life. The poets represented are among the best and best-known of contemporary poets: e e cummings, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Lowell, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and Langston Hughes. Poems range in mood from sad to funny, but there is more outrage than lyricism in them, on the whole. They speak of familiar city sights, sounds, and smells, and of feelings: loneliness and hope, joy and anger. The beauty explored is the beauty of everyday things. The language is contemporary and clear.

The poems are not long; seldom more than a page. Some are as brief as six lines. All are thoroughly contemporary and none is bland. Youngsters should have no trouble seeing the "relevance" of poetry like this; it is full of feeling, both good and bad, about the real world of 20th centry America.

Each book has a short foreword by Adoff. The appendixes include short biographies of the poets, notes on the background of the poems, and an index by first lines.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do any of these poems express feelings you have had?
2. Can a poem express anger well?
3. What kind of music might match this kind of poetry?
4. Do any of these poems make cities seem attractive?
5. Is there anything good or beautiful about a city?

Topics for Discussion

anger
prejudice
urban beauty
Negroes in America

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1976 O—220-738